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AS HYACINTH LIFTED HER EYES, SHE SAW HER HUSBAND STANDING THERE GLOWERING AT THEM.

A FATAL INHERITANCE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

In one of the spacious rooms of an old Neapolitan palace sat a young girl, her head bowed over a book.

The sunlight streamed through the stained windows, casting purple and crimson patches over the grey marble floor, lighting her chestnut hair with ruddy glory, imparting a tinge of colour to the clear pallor of her beautiful face.

No sound from the outer world came to mar the almost deadly stillness of the place, for the palace was just far enough from the city to seem isolated.

It stood in large orange and citron groves, gleaming palely through the dense foliage where

the nightingales had their homes, and the swallows clattered through all the winter months.

It had been the ancestral home of an ancient and noble Italian race, but the last of the line had fallen on evil days, and was a "wanderer on the face of the earth," and the old halls echoed now with English voices, English laughter, English words.

It had been let for a nominal sum to Luke Cray, an eccentric and disappointed man.

He was an experimentalist in chemistry, but had never achieved renown. In fact, he was one of those unfortunate who succeed in nothing; and when his wife died, and he lost half his fortune, he turned in disgust from his native land to bury himself in the old, half-ruined palace of the Murillo.

Here for eighteen years he had lived with Hyacinth, his only and much-neglected child, his studies wholly engrossing him, making him blind to the girl's growing beauty, closing his heart against love and delight.

But Hyacinth made friends for herself, and

chief among them were the Este, a proud and honourable family, whose eldest son, Raphael, as he grew into manhood, evinced a more than ordinary interest in the fair-haired English girl.

It was he who taught her music and dancing, he who instructed her in all things but her books, criticised her somewhat crude drawings—was in all matters her "guide, philosopher, and friend."

But for Raphael Este her education would have been of the most meagre kind.

As it was, although she knew neither French nor German, she was well grounded in such studies as he chose for her.

She spoke Italian and English with equal fluency; was acquainted with English manners and customs, because Raphael had been both to Eton and Cambridge, and had brought back with him many of our national ways.

She saw the world through his eyes, his opinions were hers, and yet no word of love had passed between them, and Hyacinth scarcely dreamed he was dearer to her than any other creature on earth.

Suddenly she lifted her head, for outside she heard a flower-girl singing as she passed on her way to the city.

It was only a simple song, and lost most of its charm when translated to English, but it was familiar to Hyacinth, and the air was sweet:

"My young lord's the lover
Of every burning thought
That Love's will, that Love's skill
Within my breast has wrought."

The voice died away, and the girl rested her chin in her little dimpled palm, and brooded over the words, dreamed, too, if the singer was fair and glad, if her life was goodly and sweet.

She was much given to dreaming, being so often alone.

The sunshine grew broader and brighter, the crimson, purple, and orange deepened on the grey marble floor. She stirred, and sighed slightly.

The windows were open, and suddenly a dark, handsome face peered through one of them, and a slender, supple hand tossed a cluster of white blossoms into Hyacinth's lap.

She started up, a flush on her pale face, her pansy-coloured eyes full of a great light.

"Raphael, you hero! How early you are! And, pray, what have you in your hand?"

"A letter—an English letter. I took it from Verl at the gates. May I come in?"

"Of course you may! I am all anxiety to know who is my father's correspondent."

The young man vaulted in through the window, and handed Hyacinth the letter.

"What a crabbed hand! But who would write to father after all these years of silence!"

"Satisfy your curiosity by taking it to him at once," suggested Raphael.

"Come with me; he is in the laboratory, as usual," with a hardly-suppressed sigh.

Together they trod the time-worn corridors, and came at last to an alcove hung with crimson tapestry.

Parting the curtains, they entered a large, lofty room, where a grey-bearded man sat, surrounded by phials, tubes, and various-coloured liquids.

"What is it?" he asked, impatiently, lifting a refined, weary-looking face, and fixing his dark eyes upon the girl. "You know how I hate to be interrupted!"

Hyacinth advanced timidly.

"I have brought you a letter, father; Raphael took it from Verl, and it comes from England."

Mr. Gray's worn face flushed darkly.

"After all these years!" he said, and took it from her.

But the handwriting was strange, and told him nothing. With fingers that trembled slightly he tore open the envelope, and took out a business-looking note, which he read twice before communicating its contents to Hyacinth. Then, somewhat flattered in voice and manner, he said,—

"This is from your maternal grandfather's solicitor, Hyacinth. It appears the old man is dead, and you inherit the whole of his estate, being the child of his eldest daughter. I suppose your cousin, Howell Bede, isn't too pleased to find himself second in the field; but of course your grandfather Humphrey could do nothing in the matter, as the land and fortune descend in a straight line. My dear, accept my congratulations; you are a great heiress."

Raphael was silent, looking far from pleased at the change in Hyacinth's prospects. She herself sat down, and looked at him with wide-opened eyes.

"I did not know until now that I had any relations," she said. "Who is Howell Bede? and what is he?"

"He is your cousin, and, I suppose, a gentleman at leisure, as your Aunt Clara married well. Your mother's marriage gave great offence to her family," with asperity, "and they never acknowledged her after it."

"Oh! And, pray, what is my fortune?"

"Three thousand a year, with a fine old place in Suffolk."

"Congratulate me, Raphael!" the girl cried,

excitedly. "Aren't you glad to hear of my prosperity?"

"No," he retorted, brusquely. "It sets you further off from me. I prefer you in your comparative poverty."

"But," in a hurt tone, "I fancy it must be good to be rich. Money is a wonderful help to happiness. Father, have I any other cousins?"

"Howell has a sister; I think her name is Julia. But you understand, child, this will make no difference to you for two years. On your twenty-first birthday you must appear at Cavendish to take possession of your own. Until then we shall remain here. I, for one, have no wish to see England again."

"And yet it is your land and mine. I have often wished to visit it. Raphael tells such wonderful tales of its cities and towns. Oh!" turning to the young man, "I should have been glad to have your good wishes!"

"They are always yours," he answered, gravely; "but I have a fancy your new grandeur will bring you no happiness."

"Don't say you have a presentiment of ill! That is such a threadbare idea with so many modern novelists. All their heroes and heroines have forebodings; all their ancient families have legends and ghosts, until I am tempted to wish all the aristocracy 'out of the world's way, out of the light'."

"You little democrat!" he said, with a laugh that was but half-hearted. "No; I have no forebodings, Hyacinth, but I have a strong desire to keep you here. I think you will never be happier than you are with us."

Mr. Gray looked keenly at him; then said,—

"Go away, both of you! I am busy now, but to-night we will talk matters over. No, no—no more questions now, Hyacinth!"

"Just one. Am I like my mother? Tell me that. I knew so little of her."

"You are her living image!" and he turned wearily to his self-imposed labours.

The young people went out into the garden, where broken statues and useless fountains still testified to bygone grandeur. Raphael was very silent, and his fine face bore a gloomy look wholly new to it.

"What is it?" asked the girl, glancing with new-born shyness into his dark and glowing eyes. "After all I shall not leave here for two years, and then I shall come back as soon as my business is settled."

"Hyacinth!" he cried, suddenly, "why should you go at all? Stay with me. I want you most of any. What should I do without you?"

He had taken her hands in his, and clasped them closely. The girl's heart suddenly woke to passionate life, and she was afraid of her own joy.

Perhaps he misconstrued her silence, for with a sigh he released her and moved a little from her.

"I was a fool to hold my peace so long. Had I but spoken yesterday you would have given me credit for real devotion to you, but to-day everything is altered between us—you are an heiress."

Her pale face flushed rosily; her breath came quickly. Just a moment she hesitated, then she followed Raphael and laid her hand timidly upon his arm.

"Do you mean," she said, tremulously, "that you love me as Petrarch loved Laura?"

"Yes," he answered, and at the expression of her eyes his heart leapt within him. "But of what use is it to tell you this now?"

"Raphael, I never guessed until to-day how much I was to you! Oh! don't you see this fortune that has come to me would bring me nothing but misery—if it meant separation from you? Speak! don't tempt me to say more."

He caught her in his arms and held her fast, kissing her with wild love and joy.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "shall you never be sorry for this? Shall you always be satisfied with me?"

She laughed through her tears.

"Call me sweetheart again!" she cried; "there is no name to compare with our dear old English word."

"Have you thought what Mr. Gray will say to our sudden engagement?"

"What objection can he offer, Raphael? Besides, you know, he is not sufficiently interested in me to care much what I do, and he has always liked you."

But Raphael was not very hopeful of gaining Mr. Gray's consent, and was for ending the suspense at once, only Hyacinth pleaded,—

"Let us have this one hour to ourselves," and he yielded without further persuasion.

So the long morning wore away in blissful content.

"Do you suppose," said Hyacinth, "I shall find anything so lovely in England as this old house and the groves? Ah!" with a deep breath, "this is Heaven."

"Why don't you speculate on your new relatives?"

"I do, and I've a fancy I shall not like them. I have taken a foolish prejudice to their names; Howell and Julia are so frightfully harsh."

Raphael laughed.

"I'm afraid you are not very patriotic. Nothing English appears to please you. But indeed you should be proud of your nationality."

"Perhaps I am," thoughtfully, "but I know next to nothing of my native country, and I shall be a stranger among my own kinsfolk. I begin to be sorry that this fortune has come to me. How terribly wroth Howell must be to think a little bit of a girl takes all away from him."

Then they drifted into purely personal talk which would interest none but themselves, and it was not until a servant came to summon them to luncheon that they were aware how time was passing.

"You will stay, of course!" said Hyacinth, and they went in together.

When the meal was ended, the young man begged a few moments alone with Mr. Gray; the elder man looked impatient.

"Pray be as brief as you can, Rete. I am engaged on a very peculiar subject, and grudge every minute I spend away from the laboratory."

"I will not detain you long, sir. The fact is I spoke to Hyacinth this morning, and she has promised to be my wife. We shall be glad to know you approve the step we have taken."

He spoke somewhat impudently, having a great contempt for the experimentalist.

"Just so, just so; but I thought you wished to consult me on some subject of importance. Oh, yes, you have my consent. I shall not be sorry to transfer Hyacinth to other hands. Really, a daughter is such a responsibility. Now if I had a son he could have helped me in my researches—"

But he was talking to the air. Raphael had already disappeared in pursuit of Hyacinth, whom he carried off to his own home, to be kissed and congratulated by his sisters Aloyse and Amelotte: to be rejoiced over by his handsome, stately mother, who was none the less pleased at the engagement because of Hyacinth's accession to wealth.

In the bitter days that followed so swiftly the unhappy girl would look back to this one morning as the best and brightest in all her young life, would cry aloud to have but one hour of it back, in which to rejoice a little before death came to give her the sorely-desired release.

That night she could not sleep for happiness; she wondered how she could have lived so long in ignorance of her own heart; how she could have found life so good without Raphael's love.

Towards dawn she fell asleep, and did not wake until the sun was well up, and the birds were making mad melody in the groves hard by.

She sprang up, and throwing open her window, looked towards the distant city.

"We will be married at Naples," she said, in a glad whisper; "we have spent so many happy hours together there. Oh, was ever a girl so lucky as I?"

She ran downstairs and went to the breakfast-room, expecting to find her father there; but being disappointed, hurried to the laboratory.

"Good morning, father!" she cried, entering. "Am I not late?"

He was sitting erect in his chair, but he did

not reply to her. She was not surprised, because he was always so absent-minded ; so she spoke more loudly.—

"Breakfast has been waiting a great while, and I am ravenous."

And when he still kept silent she grew nervous. "Father!" she cried, and shook him gently ; then for the first time she saw his face, and although she had never looked on death she recognised it at a glance, and shrieking wildly, fell at her father's feet.

Hearing her piercing cry the servants rushed in, to find her with her arms clasped about his knees, moaning out prayers to him to speak to her, not to leave her lonely.

He had never been an affectionate parent, but he was her only known relative, and her grief was terrible to witness.

One of the servants lifted her gently in his arms, and carried her to an adjoining room, whilst another ran for Raphael, who quickly arrived, accompanied by his mother.

Vainly the young man endeavoured to soothe her ; she clung about him weeping violently, and crying out that she had never loved her father as she ought.

But at last she slept from sheer exhaustion, and then Raphael rose and went out to make such arrangements as were necessary.

Of course there was an inquest, at which it was proved Mr. Cray died of heart disease, and Howell Bede was telegraphed for to attend the funeral and the reading of the will. And until his arrival Hyacinth lay supine and helpless, looking like the ghost of her old self, and scarcely ever speaking.

The shock of her father's death had robbed her of all energy, and she was never remarkable for force of character, but rather sweetness and docility.

At length the day of the funeral dawned, and an hour before noon Howell Bede arrived.

He was welcomed by Raphael, whom he regarded with a glance of disfavour.

"You are Raphael Este. I made inquiries of the host at my inn, and he told me all the particulars of my kinsman's death, also the supposed relationship existing between you and my cousin. May I ask if this engagement preceded Hyacinth's accession to the Cavendale estates?"

"It did not," Raphael answered, flushing hotly ; "but what of that? By birth I am somewhat Miss Cray's superior, and though we have fallen on democratic times, blue blood is still held in esteem."

"Blue blood won't keep a man," retorted Howell, rudely, "but we will leave discussion on any matter until after the funeral. And I should like to see my cousin at once."

Burning with a sense of sudden hate, Raphael controlled himself yet. It would be unseemly to quarrel with any of Hyacinth's friends on such a day as this, so he sent a servant to tell the girl Howell had arrived, and was asking for her.

She answered the summons at once, and as she thrust aside the heavy curtains, and stood a moment in their shadow, Raphael glanced keenly at Howell, wondering what impression her beauty had made on him.

But there was no admiration in the hard, reddish-brown eyes, no kindness on the cold, almost cruel face.

Hyacinth was not at all the sort of woman he affected, but for purposes of his own he did not intend she should learn this yet.

She came forward slowly, dragging her weary limbs across the marble floor, and held out a slim, white hand to him.

"You are my cousin, so we should be good friends ; and you—you have come to see the last of him!" and she lifted her lovely violet eyes, all drowned in tears, to his face, as though she sought some resemblance there to her dead parent.

"I have come to take care of you, if need be," he answered, making his voice impressive and affectionate.

But Hyacinth could not help thinking it did not accord with his eyes, and felt an instinctive distrust of him.

She turned with an air of relief to Raphael.

"Do not leave me any more," she said, "until the funeral is over. I feel so unfriended."

"You have your cousin now," with a little natural jealousy, "and he seems inclined to monopolise you."

He had spoken in Italian, and she answered in the same language.

"I dislike him, Raphael, and we shall never be friends."

Howell Bede regarded them frowningly. He had a suspicion that they were discussing him, and resented this keenly, so he broke in, abruptly,—

"Hyacinth, had you not better dress now? You have no time to spare."

Raphael crimsoned at the half-velled insolence of his tone, but deemed it wisest not to interfere, and Hyacinth tendered a ready obedience, so that the cloud blew over.

But for the remainder of the day he had small chance of speech with her.

Howell Bede led her to the grave, and supported her back again, speaking words of consolation, which she scarcely seemed to hear.

Afterwards they all assembled in the breakfast-room, where the will was produced and read.

Until then Raphael had hoped that Hyacinth had been left to his mother's guardianship until she came of age, but he was doomed to a cruel disappointment.

The will, of course, had been drawn up before she was left sole heiress to her grandfather's property, and one clause in it ran thus :—

"I appoint Howell Bede, my nephew by marriage, as sole guardian to my daughter until she attains her majority."

The little fortune he had had to leave her was strictly tied up, but there were no conditions concerning her later inheritance ! It was hers freely and unreservedly for the term of her natural life, after which it would go to her children, or, failing these, to Howell Bede, her next-of-kin.

When Hyacinth heard the conditions of her father's will her white face grew, if possible, whiter still, and she turned to her cousin with outstretched, piteous hands.

"Howell, you will not take me away ? Let me stay here with those who know and love me. I am only a stranger to you, but I am dear to them ; and—Raphael has the best claim to me."

"Your father's wishes cannot be so lightly disregarded or set aside," he answered, with an ominous flash in his eyes, but in a suave tone, "Of course, my dear cousin, you are free to return to Naples as soon as you are of age. You will then pass from my control, and will please yourself as to your course of conduct."

"It is an infamous will," Raphael broke out, "and shall be set aside !"

"The will is perfectly legal," the lawyer said, with some asperity ; "and who so fit to be the signorina's guardian as the signor, her cousin ?"

"Oh," Howell said, with lofty condescension, "I am willing to make every allowance for Este ; he has suffered such a cruel disappointment. It is not every man who is fortunate enough to secure a young and lovely heiress."

"Raphael loved me long before I came into my grandfather's estate," Hyacinth began, gently, but Howell interrupted her.

"My dear child, we are quite ready to believe he did ; our only wonder is that he deferred telling you so long."

The Signora Este rose.

"I think," she said, in cold, clear tones, "our presence is not desired here, Raphael ; and, sir, I would have you understand that no Este will calmly submit to an insult !"

Then in a gentler voice to Hyacinth,—

"My darling girl, remember always you have a friend in me ; if any trouble befalls you apply to me, and Graciella Este will not fail you. Be true, only be true to yourself and Raphael, and all will yet be well for you."

"What do you fear for me?" Hyacinth asked, all in a tremor at the turn events had taken. "Do you believe my cousin will ill-treat me ?"

"I believe he is false to the core, and covets your fortune, but it would be bad policy to treat you unkindly."

She paused, as some words of Howell's reached her.

"We shall leave here to-morrow, en route for England. I have concluded all necessary arrangements."

"Do you mean to say that you will hurry Hyacinth away in such a brutal fashion?" she questioned, almost fiercely, and the girl clung weeping about her.

"Necessity has no choice, madam," with a profound bow. "Of course I am deeply grieved to separate her from such loving and disinterested friends."

"Sir, take care!" thundered Raphael, advancing ; "you have already gone too far !"

Howell Bede was no coward, but he saw the wisdom of carrying his victory quietly, so he held his hand to Raphael.

"If I have wronged you, forgive me. I suppose I am a naturally suspicious man."

But Este refused to be mollified, neither would he take the proffered hand.

He turned to Hyacinth.—

"You must see me to-night alone," he whispered. "Oh ! love, love, I how shall we bear to part ? I shall be in the orange grove at nine ; don't fall me."

She seemed bewildered and altogether crushed by this new calamity, and beyond a promise to do as he asked she spoke no word.

Very miserably he went home, afraid to think what might happen before he and Hyacinth met again. He knew the girl was sweet and true, but he was also aware that she had not much force of character ; and who could tell, when she was once away from him, under the control of her relatives, that she might not be induced to forego her promises.

When all the funeral guests had gone Howell Bede called his cousin to him.

"I believe, Hyacinth, you think I am a harsh man, and am glad to hurt you ; but it is not so. I am only anxious to serve you, to advance your interests in every possible way ; and of course you might do far better than marry young Este, who, after all, is but the beggarly scion of a broken-down race, bankrupt in all but honour. No doubt the fellow had an eye to your fortune."

She flushed to the roots of her chestnut hair.

"If we are to be friends, cousin," she said, "you must learn to speak respectfully of Raphael ; and pray believe that nothing you may say will make me think less of him. When I am of age I shall return to Naples."

"And marry him!" he interrupted, so roughly that the girl shrank back from him ; and seeing his mistake, he adroitly turned the conversation upon Julia.

"How old is she?" Hyacinth asked, with a little show of interest.

"Twenty-three, and just four years my junior. I hope you will be good friends."

"I hope so. Oh, cousin Howell, must I go to England?"

"You have no alternative. I am your guardian, and my work lies in my own country."

"What is your work?"

"I am an architect," he answered, although he would have been puzzled to give any reason for calling himself one.

CHAPTER II.

At nine o'clock Hyacinth stole into the orange grove. In the dim light the statuettes looked strange and ghostly, and the shadows cast by the trees were so dense that she was frightened. Starting at every trifling noise, with her heart beating so madly that the sound of it was distinctly audible to herself, she hurried to meet her lover.

He was waiting for her beside one of the ruined fountains, around which roses and ivy had cast their long tendrils ; and at the sound of her light footsteps he turned, and, advancing, caught her close to his breast.

For a short time neither of them could speak ; the thought of their long, long parting held them silent, and the girl's woe had passed beyond the relief of tears. White as the heavy blossoms drooping over her, with eyes made dark by anguish,

she clung to Raphael, praying dumbly in her heart that she might die.

He was the first to speak, and at the pain and hopelessness in his voice she shrank and shivered.

"Hyacinth, my darling heart, this is worse than we ever dreamed of!"

"Oh! far, far worse!" she moaned. "With all my heart I wish I had been a poor penniless girl, with no friend in the world but yourself!"

"You would do very much for me?" he questioned, with seeming irrelevance.

"I would lay down my life for you if need were," she answered, vehemently.

"I want you rather to keep it for my sake. Do you love me well enough to run some risk for me?"

"Won't you believe that I do? I was never good at protesting."

"I will believe anything you choose to say," passionately. "Hyacinth, I am going to ask you to take a very serious step, and I am half afraid your courage will fail you!"

"What a coward I am! Oh! I wish for your sake I could be as brave as your mother and sisters. They fear nothing."

"Neither shall you if you will but give yourself into my care. Sweetheart, I want you to leave here with me—to remain in hiding until I can procure a license for our marriage."

She lifted her sweet, startled face to him.

"Oh! no, no, Raphael. I love you too well for that. I am under age, and papa told me of a case the other day, in which a man married a minor, and her guardian went to law about it. The bridegroom was arrested and sent to prison. What would your mother say of me if I allowed you to run such a risk? And I am quite sure Howell Bede is not a merciful man, and—*I think he does not like you.*"

"I am sure of it. But, Hyacinth, do you suppose there is no way of escape from Naples? And as for your money I had rather you had none. I think my income will suffice for our wants. You have no extravagant tastes."

"You forget, Raphael, that I am neither practical nor domesticated. And, say that we were married, would not all your prospects be ruined? You would not care to leave me alone and unprotected, and I certainly could not appear at Court with you. What would become of the rising young diplomatist then? No, no, dear love, we must wait patiently for the time of our reunion."

"Of course," in a somewhat offended tone, "it must be as you wish, Hyacinth; but I should have been glad if you would have consented. Ah! sweet, I am willing to give up all for your sake, fame, and country, and all I have held dear. Will you trust me in this thing, and make me happy?"

"I will not endanger your liberty," she answered, with more firmness than she had ever yet shown, "and I will try to be content to wait. Why, Raphael, in two years' time I shall be my own mistress, and then, if you love me still, I shall hasten to you—proud and glad to be your chosen wife. Two years will quickly pass, and then we shall each have the other's letters."

"In two years," he answered, desperately; "these new-found friends may change you beyond recognition—may persuade you that, with your beauty and your fortune, you should make a more suitable match than that to which your father consented. And you will find, Hyacinth, that letters are very poor substitutes for spoken words. Ah! child, child! I fear that I am losing you now and for ever."

"Oh! hush, hush! do not take all hope, all consolation from me? Do you suppose, Raphael, this parting is less hard for me than for you? Oh! my love, oh! my love, I am afraid of what lies before me! I wish I could die here and now in your arms," and she clung convulsively to him.

"Comfort me, encourage me to be brave and hopeful!"

What could he say in answer to such pitiful entreaties? How could he urge his plan upon her when she was almost beside herself with grief, and totally incapable of calm thought. He spoke to her in lovers' language, dwelt more hopefully on their future happiness than he could

in his own heart; and, when she had grown more composed, arranged the days on which she should write, and he reply to her.

How late it was growing! she must leave him so soon! And at that thought she threw her arms about his neck, not striving to conceal her anguish.

"You will let nothing turn your love from me, Hyacinth!" he pleaded, hoarsely.

"Nothing!" she answered, a steadfast light in her sweet, pansy eyes. "I will love you all my life as I love you now. Raphael! Raphael, don't you know that I could not be false?"

She thought as she looked into his handsome, dark face and glowing eyes how like he must be to Romeo, and wondered with sick fear if her love-story would end as tragically as did Juliet's.

But she said nothing of this to him, she was too much a woman to add to her lover's pain; and so, when the moment of parting came, she laid her cheek to his, and drew down his beautiful head upon her breast, all the while speaking hopefully and tenderly of the time when they should be together, and for ever.

She could never tell how, in the end, she tore herself from her lover's embrace—she could hardly remember his parting words; but at last she found herself wearily entering the room where he and she had so often sat together, where now, perhaps, they would never sit again.

As she entered Howell Bede rose from the depths of an easy chair, and, wheeling one towards her, said, with keen eyes bent upon her woe-worn face,—

"May I give you a little hint, Hyacinth, concerning the manners and customs of English ladies? It is not considered good taste to steal out at night to meet one's lover; only the lower class of women do that."

She flushed crimson.

"Cousin, it was our only chance. And when papa was alive," with a quaver in her voice, "he allowed me to wander about the grounds at all times with Raphael."

"Very possibly; and that sort of thing is very well in Italy, where the whole tone of society is more lax than in England—but in your native country the proprieties are not altogether disregarded. Now, I should advise you to go to bed; you look terribly fagged, and you have a very long journey before you."

She stood, tall, slim, and beautiful, before him, her arms drooping wearily by her sides.

"Cousin Howell," she said, wistfully, "I am afraid I do not please you, but you will be kind to me, for in the whole world I have no one but yourself and Raphael."

"You have Julia," in a carefully modulated voice; "she will be as a sister to you."

"And you will not be very vexed if I prove myself ignorant of English usages?"

"My dear child, who could be vexed with you? Don't you know you are as lovely as a dream? Never fear, Hyacinth, you shall be very happy with us at Pouncefort."

"I hope so," she answered, drearily, "but I am afraid I shall long to be back in my old home again. Good-night, Cousin Howell; Pietro will see you comfortably settled to-night."

One moment her slim, white hand lay in his, and then she was gone, and Mr. Bede threw himself back in his chair with an air of utter disgust.

"She is nothing but a pretty fool," he thought, "and not at all my style. I like a woman with plenty of 'grit' in her; and I hate a blonde. But she has money, and I have none, so with me it must be 'Hobson's choice'; only I fancy I shall have trouble about this romantic-looking fellow—she is awfully fond of him. What a comfort to know her will is as weak as her love is strong."

They were up and away very early the following morning; and although Hyacinth had begged Raphael to see her no more she looked anxiously round for him.

But he was true to his promise, although it cost him a great effort to be so, and the girl left Naples, attended only by her cousin.

She never had any distinct idea of the details of their journey because she was suffering fear-

fully with sea-sickness, and for the time was forgetful of all mental woes.

Howell was very kind and attentive, and she was not ungrateful; but she certainly wished he would leave her to herself, she so longed for solitude.

It was late on a June night when they reached Pouncefort, and Hyacinth's first impressions were not favourable ones.

All day it had been raining in torrents, and the evening was very chilly.

As she stepped out upon the platform she looked round with dismayed eyes. There was hardly a light to be seen, the rain came down with pitiless force, and there was no shelter of any kind for the weary or belated traveller.

"It is a wretched night!" Howell said, wrapping a cloak about her; "and I'm afraid you'll form a bad idea of English weather and English villages. Martin," turning to the porter, "is there any conveyance here for us?"

"Yes, sir. Boram is here with his fly. Miss Bede sent him."

Howell turned to the shivering girl.

"You see, Hyacinth, we are comparatively poor folks, and we can't afford to set up a carriage. I hope you won't think the less of us for that."

"Oh, no!" earnestly. "But I thought Uncle Bede was a rich man."

"So he was; but he engaged in foolish speculations, and lost almost all he had." Howell replied, with great apparent candour; and Hyacinth did not guess that his father had been noted for highdrinking and gambling propensities throughout the county.

She even felt sorry for Howell; and as he seated himself beside her in the one-horse fly said, timidly,—

"I shall be glad if you will use some of my money. I shall not want it all."

"The girl is a fool!" thought her amiable cousin.

But he answered her in an appropriate way, mentally vowing he would not only use a part, but eventually possess the whole of her fortune, and that within a very short space of time.

It was not a long drive to Pouncefort Lodge, and presently they were bowling up the broad, ill-kept drive, bordered on either side by dripping lime and laburnum.

Most of the windows were dark, for Miss Bede was of an economical turn of mind, and disapproved of lights and fires so long as one could do without them, and Howell shared this peculiarity.

As they alighted, and the young man led his cousin through the hall, a door on the left opened, and a lady appeared.

She was dressed in mourning, and the sandy hair, drawn up in a knot upon the crown of her head, was rather profusely ornamented with jet pins.

She was pale and plain, with extremely light grey eyes, thin lips, and a painfully slender figure.

After one comprehensive glance at Hyacinth she advanced, and, extending a small, bony hand, said,—

"So you are Hyacinth! I hope we shall be very good friends."

But she did not offer to kiss her, for which the girl was thankful, because already she felt that even Howell was preferable to his sister.

"You must be very tired and hungry," Julia said, leading the way into the dining-room, which was sparsely furnished, and, although everything in it was of the best, it wore a desolate look. There was no fire in the grate, and the lamps were turned low.

Hyacinth shivered, and noticing this, Howell said, abruptly,—

"You should have had fires lit, Julia. Our cousin is rather susceptible of cold."

"A fire in summer is unhealthy; and if Hyacinth sits in her cloak she will be quite warm. Of course you won't dress for dinner? No? Well, I will have it brought in at once."

The table shone with glass and plate, but there was a scarcity of viands, and the wine was execrable. Howell put the latter aside.

"My dear," to Julia, "I must change my mer-

chant, Bob is so scandalously unfair ; and he spoke so loftily as to impress his cousin with a sense of his rectitude and importance.

She was heartily glad to be allowed to retire to her own room. Julia accompanied her, and did her best to appear amiable and affectionate.

" You see, dear," she said, ushering Hyacinth into a large barn-like room, " that you have no occasion to feel nervous, as my door is exactly opposite yours, and you cannot move without my hearing you."

" I am not generally nervous," Hyacinth answered, not too pleased at the idea of the surveillance to which she would be subjected by this close proximity to her cousin. " I am not a coward physically, and I am so fatigued that I shall doubtless sleep well."

" I hope so ; and, if you want anything, pray ring. Good-night, my dear ! "

Then she closed the door and went downstairs, leaving Hyacinth to make her toilet for the night.

The girl stood a few moments with all her glittering hair about her shoulders, looking very like the pictures of Keats' " Madeline," the heroine of " The Eve of St. Agnes ; " then, sighing, she glanced round her apartment, and shivered.

It was a long, low room, with very few articles in it (it seemed to her there was a great scarcity of furniture in Pouncefort Lodge).

Beside a large French bedstead, with crimson and gold hangings, there was only a small dressing-table, a large chair, and a chest of drawers.

It seemed to her the Bodes were not in very prosperous circumstances ; but she was too weary to devote much thought to them, and her head had scarcely touched her pillow before she was fast asleep.

Meanwhile, Julia and Howell were deep in conversation concerning Hyacinth.

" Well," said the latter, " what is your opinion of the girl ? "

" She is very pretty," Julia answered, " especially when she smiles ; but she is a poor weak creature with no resolution or moral courage. What do you intend to do now you have her in your custody ? "

" Marry her—what else can I do ! Of course, if I were free to choose, I should not select Hyacinth Cray for a life partner, but beggars cannot be choosers."

" It is perfectly infamous that all the property should go to an unformed girl of nineteen ; and we want money so badly ! "

" No one more so. But, Julia, we must be very cautious in our treatment of her. You see her entanglement with this Este complicates affairs. We must do our best to imbue her with distrust of him."

" Not yet, Howell ; she would guess our object, especially as you and he were so antagonistic. I should allow her to write to, and receive letters from, him for a little while. It would be so foolish to arouse her suspicion."

" I think, perhaps, you are right, Julia, and it would be as well if you gave the servants to understand my ward is of somewhat weak intellect. I will hint at the same thing to outsiders. And we must keep her positively to ourselves."

" That is easily done. It is so rarely that we pay or receive visits," Julia said, with a sigh. " If father had been commonly prudent we should have been able to hold our own with any."

" We shall do that yet ! And, Julia, I've been thinking it would be as well to buy Hyacinth a horse. I shall ride with her, and keep off curious folks."

" It will entail a great deal of expense ; and very likely she doesn't ride."

" I will teach her in that case, and, with the addition of her income to ours, we can very well afford it. And," with a detestable smile, " when once she is in my wife her pin-money will allow her very little margin for extravagances."

Julia laughed, for brother and sister were congenial spirits, and Hyacinth was not likely to experience much mercy at their hands if she strove to thwart them in their purpose.

" Supposing, Howell, she refuses to marry you ? "

" Then I must use force. Do you imagine I will be beaten by a silly, nervous girl ? No ! not if she had forty lovers instead of one to champion her cause ! And when we are married I shall let the Cavendale place and leave here. We can live cheaper elsewhere ; and, after all, Julia, money is the only real good."

Her light eyes sparkled in ascent, and her pale face flushed at the idea of sharing Hyacinth's fortune with her brother.

" We must succeed," she said, as she rose and lit her candle.

" With ordinary luck we must ; but, Julia, it would be advisable to keep a somewhat better table in future. Hyacinth will pay for it when she is Mrs. Bode, and it won't do to let her see the nakedness of the land."

Julia frowned ; she hated the idea of parting with any golden pieces. It was a common saying amongst the servants " that Miss Bode would die rather than give a crust to a starving creature, and the master was just as bad."

Consequently, when the mistress issued her orders the following morning there was much surprise and speculation in the kitchen.

" Now what does this mean ? " said the cook, opening her eyes wide ; " two good fat pullets and a rib of beef. Sure Mrs. Bode'll ruin herself with such extravagance ! I suppose it's all because of Miss Cray's coming. Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," and I haven't seen such a larder since I've been here ; no, never since the day I came."

" I think I know their drift," said the housemaid saucily. " Miss Cray has got money, and the master means having it ; and before he can touch it he must marry her. Pooh ! that's what he's after."

" I don't think so, for Miss Bode said her cousin is rather weak in the head."

" Just about as much as I am," retorted the housemaid. " My dear soul, I can see through a brick wall with a hole in it as well as most folks."

Then the breakfast-room bell rang, and the little assembly broke up.

Hyacinth's first impressions of Pouncefort Lodge did not improve as the day wore on ; the grounds were ill kept, and in some places totally bare of flowers or shrubs ; the rooms were all alike, gloomy and stiff-looking, the windows narrow and high ; the surrounding country singularly flat and ugly, and she came to the premature conclusion that her native land was very unlovely.

She was not a clever or a suspicious girl, and as her cousins treated her with unvarying courtesy and attention, she began to think she had cruelly misjudged them, and grew angry with herself, because she seemed farther from loving them as each day went by.

Howell had bought her a horse (out of her own income), and was teaching her how to ride ; and very soon folks grew familiar with her face and form along the narrow roads and lanes surrounding Pouncefort.

" How beautiful she was ! " they said amongst themselves, and felt a sincere pity for her, because in some subtle way Howell had contrived to impress them with the fact that intellectually she was very defective ; and he alleged as an excuse for receiving no calls in her behalf that she was horribly afraid of strangers.

In those days she was not unhappy ; she had received two letters from Raphael, each breathing of love and trust ; and it was no uncommon thing to hear her sing as she went about the house and grounds.

One day she said to Julia,—

" Why isn't you have no friends, cousin ? "

" The poor scarcely ever have," with well-simulated bitterness. " It was very different when my father lived."

" Poor Julia ! " with ready sympathy. " I do wish cousin Howell would let me share my money with you and him."

" I wonder what your lover would say to such an arrangement ! "

" Oh, he would be glad to know I was poor

again," with touching faith in him. " You see he loved me long before I came into my money."

" I hope he did ; but it is curious your engagement dates only from the day on which you received the news ; and he himself is poor."

" Yes," with flushed cheeks and bright eyes ; " but I wish, Julia, you would not persist in misjudging him. You would not if once you met and spoke with him."

" But Howell has seen him."

" And Howell is prejudiced. Few Englishmen will acknowledge a foreigner has any claim to goodness."

" Perhaps there is a greater reason for his prejudice than you are aware of," said Julia, with a side-long, furtive glance at her cousin's sweet, troubled face.

" If there is I ought to know it. Don't speak in riddles, Julia."

" I am afraid Howell would be very angry if he thought I had betrayed his confidence, and you must never let him guess I have done so. The fact is, my dear Hyacinth, he loves you, and is miserable because his passion is so hopeless."

" Oh, no, no, Julia ; you must be mistaken," the girl cried, distressedly.

" I only wish I were," and gathering up her work she went out, and up to her brother's room, where she knew she should find him.

" Well, Howell, I have broken the ice, and she is not angry, only sorry ; and now you must make the next move. It is high time something was done."

He made no answer, but stood looking out of the window with frowning eyes.

" Of course you don't expect to win without a struggle ? "

" No, I don't ; for all her gentleness I've a fancy the girl can be obstinate on occasion. Well, if she won't listen to me we must begin operations, as you say enough time has already been wasted. She has been two months here now. We are to ride together this morning, and I will give her an opportunity to save herself much unpleasantness."

Half an hour later the two horses were brought to the door, and Hyacinth came out, looking very lovely in her perfectly-fitting black habit.

She waved her hand gaily to Julia as she cantered away, and tried her best to forget that Howell loved (?) her.

They rode through loneliest lanes, down narrow drifts, where the horses sometimes stumbled, and had to be held up with a firm hand.

Howell now and again patted her animal, or adjusted her bridle for her, looking the while into the lovely flushed face with its starry, pansy eyes.

" Do you regret coming to England now ? " he asked, speaking with unnecessary empressement.

" No ; I think I should know something of my own country, although I shall be glad enough to see Italy once again. You see I lived all my life there."

" Have you not thought what a terrible blank there will be at Pouncefort when you are gone ? Cannot you resolve to stay with us for all time ? "

" No ; I have promised to return to Naples as soon as I have attained my majority ; but before I go I should like to see Cavendale, because it was my mother's birthplace."

" I will take you there ; but, Hyacinth, if you had not promised to return do you not think you would be content to remain here ? I have been telling myself lately that perhaps you did not quite know your own mind, or were hurried into your engagement, and I have been trying to hope that my patient love and devotion would bring me my reward. Hyacinth, will you marry me ? "

" Cousin Howell, I am very sorry," she said, gently and grievously. " I did not suppose you loved me, or I would have tried to prevent this declaration. You have been most good to me, but you should not have forgotten that I am engaged to an honourable man, whose whole life is given up to me, as mine is to him. One day, please Heaven, I shall go back to him, never to leave him any more."

Feb. 18, 1899.

"And this is your answer!" Howell asked, his voice hoarse with rage, and he kept his face steadily averted from her, because he knew the look there was not good to see.

"Yes, I am so sorry," and then she paused, not knowing what to say.

"You have given me a blow, Hyacinth, but I am a man, and must not complain. Let us go home now; you have taken away all the pleasure of our ride."

She was only too glad to turn her horse's head, and reaching the Lodge she sprang down, not waiting for Howell's assistance, and ran up to her room in a very disturbed state of mind.

"It was cruel and dishonourable of him to speak to me so, knowing all he does of Raphael!" she said, and felt sorely vexed with him.

Julia met her brother in the hall.

"Here is a letter for Hyacinth from Naples. What shall I do with it?"

"Give it to me; and in future see she receives no letter from him, or posts one to him."

CHAPTER III.

It was early October, and Hyacinth sat alone in her cold and cheerless room; she had changed greatly in the last three months. She had always been pale, but her pallor was that of illness now, and there were dark circles about her lovely eyes, which told of long nights of weeping and weary days of watching.

All through those sad and tedious weeks no letter had reached her from Raphael or his relatives, although she had written again and again in terms of passionate entreaty, praying them, by the love she bore them, not to forget or forsake her now.

It is needless to say that those appeals never went further than Pouncefort Lodge, and that Raphael's letters were always extracted from the post-bag by Julia's skilful fingers.

The Bedes tried to shake the poor girl's faith in her lover, but failed signally.

She was not strong in character, but she was true, and very firm in her trust in Raphael, and to all their reasonings she answered,—

"He will explain all when we meet. Perhaps even now he is on his way to me."

Then she would beg Howell to take her to Naples, that all this mystery and suspense might be ended; but he answered her shortly, that so long as she was his ward she should not so degrade herself as to go in pursuit of a faithless lover.

And lately he himself had been very persistent in his attentions to her. She had frankly told him she did not, and never could, love him, but he had laughed unpleasantly and said,—

"If they were once married love would come, and people who had only a quiet affection for each other usually were the happiest couple."

She was conscious, too, that virtually she was a prisoner. If she rode, Howell was always her cavalier, if she walked, Julia was her companion, and as yet she knew none of the people round her.

She longed to attend the parish church, but the Bedes were not remarkable for piety, and were afraid of Hyacinth making acquaintances who might prove troublesome. So she lived her lonely life, hoping and praying for news from Raphael, and daily growing more depressed, more fragile.

As she sat dreaming of the happy past, contrasting it with the miserable present, the door opened, and Julia entered.

"Howell is coming to see you presently," she said, advancing towards her cousin, "and if you wish to please him you must try to look more cheerful; and see, here, I have brought you some hollyhock berries to brighten your dress."

Hyacinth took the berries, because to refuse them would have seemed ungrateful, but she made no effort to fasten them in her gown, only sat toyng nervously with them. Presently she lifted her lovely, sad young eyes to Julia's, and asked, with a pitiful sound of entreaty in her voice,—

"Is there no letter for me to-day?"

"Is there ever a letter for you?" with scornful asperity. "Really, Hyacinth, you can have no pride, no maidenly modesty, to remain so constant to one who has long since deserted you; who is evidently weary of you!"

"I will never believe Raphael is false until he himself tells me so; and as for pride, cousin Julia, I think I never had any where he was concerned."

Julia looked contemptuous, but she only said,—

"Won't you wear my berries, Hyacinth?"

Mechanically the girl fastened them at her throat, and then fell into her old listless, languid attitude.

Julia boasted about "tidying" the room, as she called it. Never since Hyacinth came to Pouncefort Lodge had a servant been permitted to enter her apartment. The pert, pretty housemaid had once attempted it and been summarily dismissed, and the other maids had been so impressed with the idea of Hyacinth's "weakness of intellect, and occasional violent fits," that they were glad to avoid her.

When Julia had succeeded in making the room a shade stiffer and uglier than before, she turned to go.

"I shall send Howell up to you," she said, and passed in the doorway to look at her handiwork.

"I should be glad," Hyacinth murmured, nervously, "if I might have a fire; it is so cold to-day, and the room is draughty."

"You can sit with us in the breakfast-room," coldly; "and really, Hyacinth, you have been long enough with us to understand we can afford no luxuries. Do I ever ask or wish for a fire in my apartments?"

"Perhaps you are not so susceptible to cold as I am, and if my allowance will provide me with such a horse as mine, it surely would keep me in fire."

"You had best speak to Howell; he is so foolish where you are concerned that he will grant you any request, however immoderate. You will perhaps be surprised to hear that he purchased your horses at the cost of his own comfort, but he did not wish you to know it was his gift, so I should advise you to be silent about it."

Hyacinth started up, a hectic flush on either cheek.

"I will not accept so costly a present from him. Raphael would be vexed to think I could do so. I will tell Howell myself; perhaps he will understand."

"Doubtless," with a little, cynical laugh, and she disappeared, to be immediately followed by her brother, who came in smiling, and resplendent in a new suit.

He sat down by the girl, and took one of her slender hands in his.

"My dear," he said, "I want to talk to you upon a serious matter."

"I'm too cold to speak about anything," Hyacinth answered, with petulance wholly new to her. "I want to know, cousin, if it is impossible for me to have a fire here. You see I sit so many hours alone—"

"But why, my dear girl?" and there was a sudden angry gleam in his cruel eyes.

"Because from this window I can see the road, and I watch hour after hour for a glimpse of the postman, always hoping he will bring me a letter."

"You shall have your fire but you'll never hear another word of or from Raphael Este. He wanted you only for what you have, not for what you are, and doubtless he is now paying court to some other heiress."

"No, no, Howell, you don't understand him. He is the truest, best, and noblest gentleman, and my father was glad to give me to him."

"Because he had the same blind trust in Este as you have—was quite an inexperienced in the ways of the world as you."

"Our trust was not misplaced," with a little assumption of pride that was very pretty.

Howell began to grow angry.

"Hyacinth, just listen patiently to me for a few moments. This engagement of yours never had my sanction, and never will have so long as

I have any control over you, and until you are twenty-one you are entirely in my power. I don't want to be harsh with you, but I am not a merciful man when thwarted, and you would do well to please me in this thing. Now, I am not good at sentiment, but I love you and I want you for my wife."

"Oh, cousin! You promised never to speak of this unless I were free."

"And you are! Does not Este's long silence go to prove that? Hyacinth, will you say yes?" and once more he tried to take her hand, but she shrank back.

"No, no. It would be a sin to marry one man whilst I love another, and I shall never care less for Raphael. If he is false, all my heart and all my life will be buried in the grave of my despised and rejected love."

His voice was so harsh when he spoke again that she was frightened.

"It would be wise to conciliate me, to keep silence about this handsome, worthless fellow. I tell you plainly I mean to make you my wife, and you are powerless to prevent me."

"You could not marry me against my will!" with a flash of spirit rare in her.

He smiled sardonically.

"You are over-confident, Miss Cray. As surely as you sit listening to me here, so surely shall you be my wife before this year closes."

She started to her feet.

"You must be mad to believe you could so coerce me. Why, even though you dragged me to the altar I would not speak the words that would bind me to you. I could not be so false to myself and Raphael!"

Again he smiled.

"Don't excite yourself, Hyacinth. Sit down, and I think I can persuade you that it is useless to strive against my will. Do you know that anything you may say or do would be attributed to your peculiar condition? that it is currently reported and believed that you are mentally weak? Oh! believe me, I have spared no efforts to make my cause a good one."

"Are you quite without mercy?" she wailed, her cheeks as white as lilies, her eyes full of terrible fear and anguish. "Oh! cousin, what harm have I ever done you that you should seek to break my heart, and make all my life a misery to me? If it is my fortune that you want, take it and let me go free. I ask no more. Indeed, indeed, I long only for freedom; and I will never say one word that is not in praise of you."

He grasped her wrists cruelly and fiercely.

"You fool!" casting aside the mask he had worn so long and so well. "You cannot give or take as you please; you cannot make 'ducks and drakes' of your fortune. As soon as I knew the old man was dead, and that Cavendale came to you, I swore to marry you, and I mean to keep my word. So it would be as well to resign yourself to the inevitable."

"I never will!" she cried, trembling in every limb. "I begin to believe now that you have all along played treacherously with me—that, to further your own ends, you have stolen my letters, and kept back Raphael's. It was your policy to make me doubt him, but you have not succeeded."

His face was dusky with rage as he answered,—

"Your supposition is fairly correct, and, by Heaven! Este shall never have you unless he wins you over my dead body. I want Cavendale; if I could gain it without burdening myself with a wife I would. As it is, I must endure the nuisance for the sake of the fortune."

Hyacinth sank into her chair, and looked at him with wide, frightened eyes; her slender hands were clasped convulsively over her bosom, her breath came in deep gasps.

"Surely," she panted, "in this house there must be one person willing to assist me! I will appeal to each and everyone—"

"Do so," he interrupted, "and they will humour what they believe to be your hallucination, and shrug their shoulders over it. Oh! I have carefully provided against any catastrophe of that nature."

"You have hemmed me in," she moaned. "Oh! father, oh! my father, why were you so

careless of my happiness!" and, covering her eyes, she wept alone.

But her sobs quickly ceased, and she lay back in her chair supine and still. Howell bent over her, a contemptuous look in his eyes; then he walked to the door, and called Julia, who quickly answered the summons.

"Well!" she said, questioningly. "Am I to congratulate you, Howell?"

"Not yet; but go in to her. The fool has fainted," and he strode downstairs.

After that Hyacinth found life very hard. She was kept a close prisoner in her room, seeing no one through all the weary hours of her weary days but Julia.

The promise of a fire had not been fulfilled, and, as the season was unusually severe, she was compelled to wrap herself in whatever shawls she might possess. Her food was prison fare, and when night fell she sat many hours in the dark, until in her weakened condition she imagined all kinds of horrors, and peered into the corners with frightened eyes and fast-beating heart.

"I shall go mad!" she cried, one day, in her despair, "I shall go mad."

"You can easily end your misery," Julia said, icily. "You have but to consent to marry Howell, and then you will be happy enough."

"I will not break my word to Raphael," sobbing wildly all the while. "I would rather die! Ah! it would be better for me if you would put me out of my anguish. Howell wants Cavendale—my death would give him that. Well, then, I am a poor, weak girl, wholly in his power, what should prevent him taking my life? Any death would be easier than such an existence as mine."

"Howell is too wise to risk any discovery, although I've no doubt it would relieve him to know you were out of the way for ever."

"Julia! Julia, are you a woman, and yet cannot feel pity for me? Oh! think of my helpless, friendless condition, and show me some compassion!" and the unhappy girl flung herself on her knees before the hard-faced woman, whose heart was closed so utterly against her.

"I am with my brother in this thing, as in all others, and I shall not fail him. And, pray, what hardship is there in marrying a young and handsome man? One who will look after your interests——"

"Because they are identical with his own," with sudden bitterness. "Oh! you reason well, cousin Julia, but you fail to convince me."

CHAPTER IV.

WEEK followed week, and it was now near the close of November, and Hyacinth's lot grew daily worse. Julia was her most constant companion and gaoler, for she was not allowed to leave her room, and the confinement was telling upon her terribly.

She was very wan and weak, had lost all her little stock of courage, and, in most things, was as a child in the hands of her unscrupulous relatives.

One day Howell entered her apartment, and bidding his sister leave him alone with Hyacinth, closed and locked the door behind her. Then he turned to the shrinking, shivering girl.

"Now, Hyacinth, we have had quite enough of this foolish and useless obstinacy. I have given you ample time for reflection, and my patience is altogether exhausted. Once more, will you marry me?"

"Once more I say no," trying to appear brave and resolute.

"I think you will sing another song presently," he answered, coarsely, "when I place the alternative before you. I don't want to proceed to extreme measures, but you will force me to do so unless you are reasonable."

He waited to hear the effect of his words, but her face was averted, and she would not speak; so he went on,—

"We will be married by special licence, and there shall be no unnecessary fuss about the wedding; I object to a lavish outlay. And as

soon as the ceremony is over we will run down to Cavendale, and see what improvements can be made on the estate. I intend building——"

Hyacinth broke out into a sudden passion.

"We will not be married!" she cried, fiercely. "If you force me to go to the altar with you I will throw myself on the mercy of the clergyman. He dare not perform the ceremony against my will!"

Howell met her glance with an evil sneer.

"Of course you will please yourself, but you would be wise to submit to my will. Sit down, and I will acquaint you with a few facts of which you are yet ignorant."

Mechanically she obeyed him, and he went on, harshly,—

"As I told you once before, the Pouncesfort people are impressed with the belief that you are a 'natural'; they greatly command the care and consideration with which we treat you. No one is more impressed with our goodness than Mr. Chapman, our most worthy vicar. He knows I intend making you my wife, and attributes this partly to the effect your beauty has had upon me, partly to ambition. Have I made myself clear so far? Well, if you consent to my arrangement we shall be married in this house, and leave at night for Cavendale; if not (and his face was so dark she thought he would strike her)—'if not, I shall make use of your supposed idioty. I shall place you in a private asylum for 'Incurables.'"

"You would not be so inhuman!" she cried, in a sudden access of fear. "I have wronged you in no way! I am willing to give you all I have!"

"So long as you live I cannot touch a farthing beyond the amount allowed for your maintenance. I should derive no benefit from your incarceration; but, at least, I should have my revenge upon you for thwarting all my plans. I give you until to-night to consider your answer," and without further speech he unlocked the door and passed out.

All day long the unhappy girl lay upon her bed with hidden face, sobbing and writhing in her anguish; praying wildly for help, but no help came, and at night the persecutor came again. Hyacinth was sitting wrapped in a crimson shawl, and the awful pallor of her face, the piteous entreaty in her eyes, would have touched any heart but Howell's to compassion.

He glanced at her wan features with strongest disfavour.

"I have come for your answer," harshly, for there was now no need for further pretence.

She fell on her knees before him weeping wildly, crying to him to have mercy on her, imploring him to let her go back to those who loved her.

He lifted her roughly, and, holding her wrist in a strong grip, compelled her to confront him. "Choose," he said, brutally. "Shall it be marriage or the asylum?"

"I am in your power; I cannot help myself. I—I will marry you," and swaying forward she fell at his feet, for the time mercifully unconscious.

Howell looked down at the slim, piteous figure contemptuously.

"The weak fool!" he said to himself; and then went out, leaving Hyacinth alone.

When she recovered Julia was with her. There was a hateful look of triumph in her narrow, light eyes, a satisfied smile about the thin, cruel mouth.

"So you have given in!" she said, gloating over her cousin's too evident misery.

"Heaven help and forgive me, I have!" and she hid her face in her arms, moaning like one in mortal pain.

"To-morrow I will choose your wedding-dress; the ceremony will take place in a fortnight."

Too miserable for speech, Hyacinth sat with her head upon her arms, wondering dully why she could not die; what this cruel pain at her heart meant if not death.

She was thoroughly cowed, and too wretched to think of anything but her misery; but she was not strong enough to take her own life, or to attempt any violence towards those who had so wronged her.

In all the years of her after life she could never

tell how the next fourteen days passed. She submitted herself to Julia's hands, watched the gradual completion of her bridal dress with heavy, tearless eyes; ate, slept, or walked as she was bidden.

Even at night she was not alone, for Julia shared her room now, so that she could not indulge in the bitter luxury of fruitless tears.

Slowly the hours dragged on, and she counted each one as it went, and whispered to her heart she was one step nearer her doom, one further from Raphael.

But she made no moan, no outcry; she had got beyond either, and was resigned in a terrible way to her cruel fate.

At last the bridal morning came. Julia dressed her, and commented volubly on her pallor and waneness; then when the last button had been fastened, and all adjusted to Miss Bede's satisfaction, she led Hyacinth down to the breakfast-room where Mr. Chapman and Howell were awaiting them.

Even in that supreme moment of anguish she noticed the look of pity on the clergyman's face, and whilst one might draw breath she thought of crying out the whole truth to him, and asking his protection.

But fear prevailed, and she was so terribly ignorant of English law that she did not know to what length Howell could carry his authority.

So she stood up beside him, surely the palest, unhappiest bride who had ever plighted her troth.

She was a mere machine in her cousin's hands, speaking and moving only when a sign from Julia warned her to do so.

The ceremony was soon ended, Mr. Chapman had shaken hands with her, and called her by her new name! Howell (for form's sake) had descended to kiss her brow, and the servants also had been called in (also for form's sake) to congratulate her.

Then the clergyman took his leave; the servants shook their heads and muttered,—

"Poor thing, there was no doubt she was drafted!"

She heard them, and although she felt how imperative it was for her to maintain her calmness, she burst into a long, wild-fit of laughter.

Howell took her by the arm, and led her up to her room.

"Silence!" he said, when once he had closed the door; "silence, you fool, or I will place you in safe custody yet!"

She lifted her eyes to his in mad fear; then she cried out,—

"Do with me what you will; to-day I have no care for myself. I am mad! Oh, Heaven, I am mad with my woe!"

He leaned towards her, and throwing an arm about her, held her fast, whilst he looked into her face with a cruel, threatening look, which had always had power to scare her into obedience.

But she did not heed it now; her eyes were riveted upon a purse which was plainly visible in one of the pockets in the skirt of his coat.

Swift as lightning, and stealthily as a practised pickpocket she had drawn it out, and secreted it under the folds of her dress; then she said, slowly and dully,—

"Let me alone, and I will be quiet. Oh, I promise you I will be no further trouble to you."

He had so poor an opinion of her courage that he did not suppose for an instant she would attempt escape, or thwart him in any way, so he released her, and went down to Julia.

The table was spread with unwanted luxuries, and for once there was good wine, and plenty of it; but neither brother nor sister invited the pale young bride to sit down with them. Perhaps they dreaded the sight of that sad, wan face; it would have been as a death's head at their feast.

Howell Bede was an abstemious man as a rule, but to-day he was so elated by his success that he drank freely, so freely indeed that Julia told him, with a laugh, that he would not see Cavendale that night.

Meanwhile, in her own room, Hyacinth stood, Howell's purse in her hand. How she dreaded lest he should discover his loss, and rouse the

whole house to search for it, for now there was but one thought in her brain—the longing thought of escape, but one word in her heart, and that was "Naples;" and but for this stolen money she was penniless.

Slowly she counted over the coins; there were twenty in gold, and several florins. She replaced them in the purse, which she secreted in her bosom, then going out on the landing she listened to the voices below.

How noisy Howell was getting, and how shrilly Julia laughed!

She snatched up a jacket and hat, which she hastily slipped on; then she stole down the stairs like a culprit, and paused a moment outside the dining-room, sick and motionless for very fear.

"What a pity you were compelled to take such an encumbrance with your fortune," said the amiable Julia, in an unusually frisky tone; "but she will have small chance for extravagance when once I join you at Cavendish."

"I wish she were dead!" Howell answered, savagely. "It makes a fellow feel nervous but to see her white face and great solemn eyes. I believe I hate her!"

Hyacinth drew in a deep breath, and shuddered through all her slender frame.

"I will never live with him!" she said. "I dare not! I dare not!" and with courage born of despair she sped along the hall, and out into the grounds.

Oh! if they should see her now, and bring her back; surely her heart would break!

Her one idea was to get back to Naples; once there she felt the Estates would help her to the utmost of their power; then came the thought of what she should say to Raphael, how explain to him all that had passed.

Then she sank by the roadside, covering her face with her hands, and weeping bitterly, because, as in a flash, she realised what tie bound her to Howell, and that now she could never be anything to her lover.

But her imminent danger urged her on: she would never rest again until she reached the home of her childhood; and she remembered the route so clearly that she said,—

"Surely I shall escape him. If he follows it will be but slowly, and perhaps now he has secured my fortune he will let me go free!"

She did not know what she should do when she reached Naples; she had a vague idea that she should enter a convent.

"There," she said to her sad heart, "I shall be safe; he will not dare to take me away from a holy place!"

Three hours after she left Pouncesford Lodge her bridegroom ran upstairs to her room. He was excited, and inclined to be hilarious; but when he found the bird had flown his wrath knew no bounds.

Still later he discovered his loss, and raved like a lunatic; and whilst Julia tumbled a few articles into his portmanteau, he said,—

"I am going straight on to Naples. There is no other place she would go to."

"And what will she do there? Raphael Este is cut off from her for ever."

"Just now she is mad with grief; and as she might make things very rough for us I must follow at once, and bring her back! By Jove! when she is in my power she shall understand what it is to offend her 'lord and master'!"

Julia laughed.

"She has more daring than we believed. We ought to have remembered that 'still waters run deep!'"

CHAPTER V.

HYACINTH performed the journey from England to Naples without any mishap; but her beauty and her singular timidity attracted much attention, and were of great service to Howell in his search for her.

Little did the poor girl imagine that he was never far behind her, that he followed in her track with the pertinacious ferocity of a sleuth-hound.

She only felt she was going home, she only

knew that every step took her nearer to those who loved and would protect her.

It was quite dark when she reached San Giovanni a Teduccio, which is a small town about half-an-hour's journey from Naples; but she would not rest there.

"To-night," she said, "I shall be with my dear ones!"

And her heart beat heavily with the rapture of that thought, her colour came and went fitfully, and her happiness gave her back some of the lost bloom of her youth.

At last her journey was over, and she trod the old familiar Neapolitan streets, careless of the curious or admiring glances cast at her. She could not picture her old home changed in any respect; she did not imagine it as inhabited by any other family.

Rather she believed she should find the lights burning, the old familiar articles of furniture each in its place, the old familiar faces to welcome her.

Now she had left Naples behind and trod the quiet, unfrequented road leading to the orange and citron groves, where in happier days she had lingered with Raphael.

Already, under the pale light of the newly-risen moon, she caught glimpses of the turrets and spires, hints of statuary and fountains, which she had known from childhood.

But when she drew nearer and crossed the neglected gardens her heart sank, and hope died within her.

Oh, how deserted it all was! Not a light in all the windows! not a voice to welcome her! not a hand to clasp hers!

She went to the hall-door, and found it unlocked; so, entering, she made her way, by the light of the moon, to the room where she had been wont to sit dreaming throughout the golden hours of sunny mornings.

What a change she found there! Every article of furniture had been removed, and her footstep sounded on the marble floor with unnatural distinctness.

She was growing nervous, but still persevered in her tour through the deserted rooms.

All were bare; not even a curtain had been left; and she began to wonder if Howell Bede had disposed of all her "household gods," and pocketed the proceeds.

As this was precisely what he had done, her thoughts did him no injustice.

Wearied at last, she sat down in one of the open windows, and gave herself up to sad and fruitless dreams.

She had taken off her hat, and her beautiful hair fell all about her face, which gleamed white and pure as any saint's, in the level beams of the moon.

Suddenly a sound broke the unnatural stillness. She started up in fear, and stood with one hand pressed upon her breast, incapable alike of speech or motion.

Footsteps crossed the hall, a light glimmered palely in the long passage; then dimly she discerned a man's figure, and in one passionate moment of rapture knew it was Raphael, and called him softly by name.

He held his light high, and peered through the shadows at the tall figure of the girl, with her wonderful hair floating about her, and he almost believed this to be an optical delusion. How could she have reached here alone?

He went nearer, and again she spoke his name.

"Raphael, it is I—Hyacinth! I have run away from home!"

She stretched out her hands to him entreatingly; and then he knew that she was in very truth his beloved one, the girl whom he had long since condemned as false to him and all her vows.

He threw his arms about her.

"My darling! my darling! we will never part again!" and rained mad kisses on the sweet, pale lips and cheeks.

She shuddered out of his clasp.

"You must never speak to me again in that way, Raphael. See—oh, my dear, see!—what a barrier they have built up between us!" and, as

she lifted her hand, he saw the marriage-ring glittering upon it.

He released her and fell back a pace, such scorn and anger on his face that she cried out to him to have pity on her.

"I was not wantonly false," she said, sobbingly; "but they forced me into this marriage because they wanted my money, and could get it no other way, unless, indeed, he murdered me! Raphael, do not hate me. Indeed, indeed, I have been more stoned against than stoning!"

At the despair in her young, sweet voice the agony in her beautiful eyes, he relented a little, and said,—

"Go on now, Hyacinth; tell me all."

Word by word she told her pitiful tale, and he did not seek to interrupt her by a look or a gesture; but she guessed what thoughts were working in his mind by the sombre rage in his eyes, the compression of his mouth. When she had ended and he still did not speak she crept a little closer.

"Speak to me, Raphael!" she pleaded brokenly.

"Say you do not blame me!"

He caught her to his heart, and a groan burst from him.

"Great Heavens! that such a thing should be! Love, oh, love, what shall we do? How can we bear to live apart, loving as we do? It were no sin to take his life—nay, it were commendable, rather!"

Hyacinth was frightened by the menace in his voice, and clung to him, entreating him to do nothing rashly; praying him, for her sake, and the sake of his honour, to leave her husband unmolested.

"I do not ask you to avenge my wrongs," she said; "I only ask for peace. And since all between us is over, since I am as one dead to you, I will see you no more after to-night; but all my love will go with you through all your ways, and I shall pray that your life may be happier than mine! Oh!" breaking into sudden passion, "if only I had consented to your prayer! If only I were your wife! Raphael, Raphael! if we could have foreseen this I should have begged you to take my life rather than let me go with him!"

She could not tell how cruel it was to listen to her words and not offer her his life—to pray her by with him to some place of refuge.

Surely this was the cruelest test to which she could put him. But he stood it well, although his breath came hard and fast, and his face was set and white, as though in death. He pat her from him lost the touch of her clinging hands should unman him, and force him to speak words that would be an insult to her and a disgrace to him.

"You cannot stay here alone and at night," he said; and she wondered at his sudden coldness. "For your own sake you must be very careful of your reputation. What shall I do for you?"

"Take me to your mother. She will pity me, and help me. Oh, Raphael! what lucky chance brought you here to-night!"

"I often come here at this hour; and since I thought you false some strange fascination has hung about the place for me. I have sat so often in your old seat by the window, trying to picture you as you used to be! Not fickle or worthless any more, but just the true, sweet girl who had won my whole heart's love."

She began to tremble under his words. She was so young, and so helpless, and had been so deeply wronged!—and, more than all, she loved him better than life!

Perhaps he saw this, and feared for her safety and his own. However that might be, he broke out suddenly—

"And in what way can my mother help you?"

"I have thought of that!" drearily. "I fancied she could place me in a convent until such time as the search for me is over. I could earn my own bread, I think, by doing fine needlework, and, if not, surely the good Sisters would not grudge me my bed and board. I hope—oh, I sincerely hope!—I shall not trouble any of you long!"

Ah! how he longed to speak tender, comforting words to her! But honour forbade this,

and he tried always to remember she was another man's wife.

"Let us be going," he said, gently. "It is getting late, and it would be wiser not to rouse the household. Perhaps we can get you safely away to night. The Abbes at San Gleyanni a Teduccio is a personal friend of my mother's, and will do much for her. We will take you over there at once if my mother approves."

He drew her hand within his arm, and led her towards the door, and as she lifted her heavy, sad eyes, she saw her husband standing there gazing at them.

She uttered a shrill shriek and threw herself on Raphael's breast, crying madly—

"Save me! Oh, Raphael! save me! Kill me rather than give me back to him!"

The Italian disengaged himself gently from the clinging girl, and advanced to meet his enemy.

Howell was no coward, and at once placed himself in an attitude of defence. Then he called to his wife to stand beside him, and added such a vile epithet to her name that Raphael sprang forward, his eyes ablaze with hate and rage, and struck him such a blow that he staggered backwards and seemed about to fall.

But if the Italian was the most agile, Howell had far more strength and weight, and quickly recovering himself he flung himself upon his foe, and struck him upon the head with a blow that might almost have felled an ox.

Without a word or a groan Raphael threw up his arms; there was the sound of a sickening thud upon the marble floor, and then the grey and white stone was stained with a tiny stream of blood.

With a wild and bitter cry Hyacinth flung herself down beside her lover, imploring him to speak, wailing that he was dead, and had died for her sake.

Then she was lifted forcibly, and borne away swooning, and not knowing if the heart that had loved her so truly was still for ever.

In the morning the Signora Este, becoming alarmed at her son's prolonged absence, sent servants in search of him; and one of them, knowing his favourite haunt, went to the old castle, and found his master lying all silent and bloody on the floor of Hyacinth's favourite room.

He at once procured assistance, and Raphael was carried home by sympathetic friends and sorrowing servants, and there in a darkened room he fought his way back to life.

But long before consciousness and strength returned to him, Hyacinth had been spirited away to England, and the Signora had been powerless to help her, not knowing of her appeal, or of that disastrous interview with her son.

(Continued on page 449.)

MY SWEETHEART.

—III—

CHAPTER XI.

PAULA GARSTIN sat looking at the woman, her eyes dilated, her face slowly paling.

What was the sin this woman had committed, which she had sworn never to reveal? Had she done right in making such a promise? Paula wondered vaguely.

"I will break right into the thread of my story," the woman began, sobbing softly. "It is better so. Some years ago I was housemaid in one of the grandest mansions in Mayfair. The family consisted of a proud old banker, his wife, and a lovely young daughter—Mignon."

"To say the girl was beautiful but faintly describes what Mignon was like. She had wine-brown eyes, dark shining brown hair that lay across her forehead in the dearest of love-looks, red lips, and an olive complexion heightened by a soft pink in her cheeks. She was the dearest, sweetest, most loving girl that ever drew breath, and with a heart as tender as an angel's. She was slim and tall for her age, which was about eighteen."

"She looked then so much like you do now, miss, despite your blue eyes and golden curls, that no wonder a cry broke from my lips when my eyes first fell on you."

"You may be sure she was the very treasure of her parents' hearts, and they planned for her the grandest kind of a marriage. Why, they thought if she went over to America she would marry a millionaire, and even a millionaire would not be half good enough for her."

"But Miss Mignon would not go over to America, she said she was afraid of the water."

"Then they looked for a wealthy suitor here for her; but Miss Mignon herself was more than indifferent to their plans. I, and I of all the people in the world, could have told them why—she loved a clerk in her father's bank—a handsome, noble young fellow, who was struggling to eke out an existence on a hundred a year. And he, poor fellow, fairly adored the ground Miss Mignon walked on."

"Matters went on smoothly enough until another lover came upon the scene. He had more gold than he could count, and the old banker and his wife settled it that he should be Miss Mignon's husband, whether she would or not."

"She wept and entreated, but it was of no avail. The old banker pooh-poohed at the idea of love."

"It is wealth which should be considered when an alliance is made," he declared.

"I married and went away from them. I came to my own home—this cottage—with my young husband."

"I shall never forget what happened one stormy night a few months after."

"I was sitting alone in the best room, when I heard a low tapping at the window-pane. I looked around with a start, and saw Miss Mignon's face, all wild and white, pressed close against the glass."

"I was on my feet in an instant, and flew and opened the door. I couldn't trust my own eyes. I was sure it was a vision that I had seen."

"'Miss Mignon!' I called, sharply.

"'Yes, Kate, it is I,' answered a very pitiful voice, and Miss Mignon, all cold and wet, crept up to me."

"I took her cold little hands and drew her into the room and up to the fire, where the cheery kettle hung over the coals, singing merrily.

"'What in Heaven's name brought a great lady like you to my humble roof, alone, on foot, and in this terrible storm?' I cried in amazement, making haste to unfasten the long, dripping cloak she wore; but when it fell to her feet, the words I was about to utter died on my lips with a gasp. I could only whisper, in awful terror: 'Miss Mignon!'

"'As you love me, be kind to me!' she moaned, clinging to my hands. 'I will tell you all about it,' she whispered. 'Charley and I were secretly married just a year ago, and—oh, Kate, how can I tell you!—just three months after he was stricken with the fever and died. I—I did not know it until he was buried almost a week, and all this time they were urging me to marry another.'

"I dared not tell my father that I was at that moment a widowed bride, with the heart in my bosom rent with grief, for in his rage he would have struck me dead at his feet.

"They gave out that I was betrothed to him, and they set the day for the marriage, and sent out the cards, and I realized it all, dumb with horror and amazement. But at last I grew desperate; I did not care what they did with me. Oh, Kate, I did not care if they killed me. The heart in my bosom had turned to stone.

"At last the wedding-eve drew around, and while the guests were making merry below, I fled in these garments, which I took from my maid's wardrobe.

"I hid myself for six weeks in a little village, and then, Kate, I felt so weak and ill that my heart craved to be with friends. I thought of you, and I came to you. I walked all the way, for I had no money. Do not let my parents know I am here. Oh, Kate, see! I am on my knees begging you not to let them know."

"The poor, bereaved young wife was under

this roof for seven long weeks, and here her child was born; but as its life was ushered in, her own ebbed slowly out.

"On her death-bed she sent for her father and told him all. His grief was great, and the shock of it killed her mother."

"'Kate,' said the old banker, placing the child in my arms, 'you must keep Mignon's little child for me. You shall be well paid for it. Never let the world know of this terrible affair. Even when the child grows up she must not know that she is kith and kin of mine. She has every look of her father about her—his eyes and fair hair. I should detest her for that, for never this side of heaven will I forgive the man who robbed me of my child, even though he lies in his grave.'

"I kept the child," Kate Hammond went on, weakly, "and the remittances came regularly each month."

"The child is a godsend to us—a regular gold mine, Kate," said my husband; and I thought so, too.

"One day my husband fell from a scaffolding—he was a painter—and the fall injured his spine. 'He will be a cripple for life,' was the verdict of the doctors.

"What would we do if it were not for the money that child brings us, Kate?" he sobbed. "We would surely come to want—we would starve, I think."

"But trouble never comes singly. In the midst of it all the child sickened and died."

"And now, listen to the story of myself. I dared not tell the old banker of the child's death, for from that moment the money we were receiving so regularly from him would cease, and we would have starved. I kept the terrible secret long years, and all these years the money came.

"Yesterday a letter came with the remittance, and I fell on my knees in terror when I read the written lines.

"The letter stated that the old banker was coming next week to claim his granddaughter—he had repented of his long years of neglect—and would make reparation to poor Mignon's child while it was yet in his power.

"What am I to tell him when he comes? What will I say when he asks for the girl?

"The whole story will be true to come out, and he will arrest my poor husband and me, and throw us into prison for taking money all these years under false pretences.

"He will track us to the other end of the world to hunt us down."

"When I looked upon your face and you told me you were homeless and friendless, and looking starvation in the face if you failed to find work, a sudden inspiration came to me. It was this: When the old banker comes let me bring you to him as his granddaughter. Think, girl! you have nothing to lose and everything to gain—wealth a princess might envy, position as the great banker's heiress, jewels and laces that would purchase a king's ransom, coaches and horses and liveried servants—every wish gratified that money can control. Oh, think, girl! dare you refuse it? I gain nothing by the arrangement—you have everything to gain."

"It will never occur to him to doubt your identity for a single instant when I present you to him, and then you look so much like poor Mignon did at your age that he could not possibly have the slightest doubt. Now, what do you say to my plan?" she asked, hoarsely, breathlessly.

"I must think first," murmured Paula, faintly. "My head reels—I—I am bewildered."

"No wonder you are bewildered," declared Kate Hammond. "No poor girl in this wide world ever had such a chance of wealth offered her before—and never will again while time lasts. You are mad to hesitate a single instant. Think of how many young girls in this big city to-night would jump at the chance to change from a working-girl, counting over carefully the pennies that each meal costs, to a great fine lady in silks and diamonds!"

"I make my head reel," gasped Paula.

"And no wonder," replied Kate Hammond. "It would make my head reel too if anyone suddenly opened out before my feet a path paved

with gold and diamonds. I will give you until noon to think the matter over. You must give me your decision then."

CHAPTER XII.

As Kate Hammond uttered these words she glided from the room, and Paula was left a prey to her own thoughts.

Wealth or poverty—which should it be? It almost seemed like a dream to her: the thought that she could decide such a question. She thought of the lovely girls she had so often envied lying back in their carriages, dressed in their diamonds, silks, and velvets, while she toiled along the street to her work, that only brought her in fifteen shillings a week.

It was madness to hesitate. The key to unlock such a golden future would never be in her hands but once in a life-time—never but once!

There was only one matter that troubled her; she would have to give up Mildred—never look upon her face again—if she accepted this golden trust; for Mildred would never condone an evil, however slight, even if it purchased the gold of the world, so great were her notions of honour and right and wrong.

At noon the next day Kate Hammond called upon the girl for her decision.

"The temptation is too strong," murmured the girl. "I can not resist it."

"Say rather, the advantages," answered Kate.

"When will he be here—the great banker, I mean?" Paula asked, suddenly.

"He may come at any moment," was the reply. "I may have barely time to coach you as to the story you must tell, which is simple enough: that you have lived here with me all your life, and that I have taken good care of you, and educated you. There is only one thing that troubles me, and that is your clothes. You could never meet him in the dress you have on. I shall have to go out and buy you something at once—the prettiest ready-made gown that I can find that will be suitable to your youth and beauty."

And she saw the girl's eyes brighten and her cheeks flush at the words.

Fearing that the girl might by any chance change her mind, Kate put her intention into execution at once, and Paula was arrayed not a moment too soon in a beautiful blue cashmere gown, with its soft floating blue ribbons at the throat, and a belt; for, looking from the window, they both saw a carriage drawn by a pair of magnificent iron-grey horses dash up the road and stop before the door.

"Oh, what if he should ever discover the truth—that I am not his daughter's child!" gasped Paula, nervously, as she saw a grand, stately old gentleman descend from the vehicle.

"How is he ever to find out?" demanded Kate, testily. "When I bring you in and present you to him, he will never dream of doubting my words."

"What was the name of his Mignon's child?" whispered the girl, nervously. "I—I should not know what name to respond to."

"You can give your own name, Paula, if you like," replied the woman, "for he does not know the name of his daughter's child. He gave it none, and we called it what we pleased. I named it Nelly, but always spoke of it in my occasional letters to him as 'your granddaughter,' fearing to him, he had such lofty ideas. So if you tell him your name is Paula, he will not dream of making any wonder over it—rest assured on that point."

It was the most intensely thrilling moment of the girl's life when Kate Hammond took her by the hand and led her into the presence of the banker.

He rose suddenly to his feet and advanced tremblingly to meet her as she entered.

"Mignon's child!" he cried, tremulously, as he clasped her in his arms with great emotion, and then drew back and looked at her earnestly. "You are as beautiful as a dream, my dear," he sighed; "but you have little or none of your

mother's looks about you. I am disappointed in that."

Paula turned deathly pale.

"What do they call you?" he asked, suddenly.

"Paula—Mignon," she responded, falteringly. "You shall take my name," he said, quickly. "You shall be called Paula Mignon Barton. The world may call you Paula if it likes and you like the name, but to me you shall be Mignon."

The girl bowed her beautiful golden head.

"Are you glad to see me, Paula?" he asked, wistfully. "Somehow you do not seem so. I am the only relative you have in the whole wide world, and something tells me that you won't have me long," he added, with a touch of pathos in his voice.

"I am more than glad, grandpa," she faltered, trying to infuse warmth in her manner.

He turned away with a sigh trembling on his lips.

"My Mignon was all warmth and love," he said, sadly. "You must take after your father, and have his ways, child."

Paula grew terrified at hearing this. She had not been in his society five minutes, and yet a certain intuition had told him there was something not quite right. Oh, what if he ever found out what she had done! She felt sure his anger would be terrible, and he would punish her to the fullest measure. She almost wished, despite the golden future, that she had not promised to take this step, and she wondered vaguely what would come of it. Ah, had she but known! Surely it was the strangest fate that ever befell a young girl.

"Come, my dear," said the old man, tenderly, "make yourself ready to accompany me at once;" and he wondered greatly that the girl betrayed so little emotion at parting from Kate Hammond, who had been almost a mother to her all these years, although Kate clung to her with lamentations, kisses, and tears, begging her to come and see her sometimes, that she might not lose altogether the sight of her bonny face.

If Kate had been a born actress, she could not have played her part better, while Paula was so awkward at deceit.

Kate watched the carriage whirr away with triumphant eyes.

"The girl has saved me from a prison cell," she muttered; "for it would have meant that for me if stern old Barton had discovered that I had been taking the money all these years, and his Mignon's child dead. But, for all the good turn she has served me, does she think that I am going to land her, a perfect stranger to me, into the lap of luxury without recompense, and good recompence, too?

"I will wait until she gets fairly installed, and then, my fine young lady, we shall see whether you will care to provide handsomely—yes, handsomely—for me, or be hurried from your high pedestal of splendour down into the depths of poverty again. It's a poor rule that won't work both ways. This girl will be a gold mine to me, as the child was."

At the very hour that Paula entered the life of splendour fate had mapped out for her, poor Mildred was weeping silently over her loss; but she hastily brushed away her tears as she heard Mrs. Morris's step outside the door.

"Mildred, my dear," she said, laying her hand lovingly on the girl's head, "Gregor is here. Have you any message that you would like me to give him? He is coming up the walk."

Mildred raised her eyes with a quick, startled glance—she always started violently when the name of Gregor Thorpe was mentioned.

"No," she added, almost inaudibly, after a few moments' pause.

The door of the morning-room was pushed open, and Gregor Thorpe himself stood on the threshold.

"You will pardon me for intruding," he said, in his deep musical voice; "but the truth is, I am off for a little journey this morning, and I am here to say good-bye to both of you."

"A journey!" echoed Mrs. Morris. "Why, how long do you expect to be gone, Gregor?"

He looked at her gravely. He dared not tell her that he was going, perhaps, on a journey

from which no traveller ever returns. This was the day of the duel.

It had been postponed twice by Dadley, but this time it was to take place without fail. He was going to face his enemy, and the result might mean life or death for him.

"How long do you expect to be gone, Gregor?" repeated Mrs. Morris.

"It may be for years, and it may be for ever," replied Gregor, trying to speak lightly and unconcernedly.

Mildred turned deathly pale. The very thought that it might be years ere she looked upon that handsome, noble face again brought to her tender heart a throb of the keenest anguish, and it brought with it a revelation that startled her, for she realised that life would not be worth living if she were never to behold him again.

And she knew now that she loved him—loved him with all the strength of which such a pure, sweet nature is capable. She loved him so truly, so deeply, if she could have died to save his life, she would gladly have done so.

Being thrown so much and so closely in contact with this handsome young man had ended fatally with poor Mildred. Her heart had gone out to him unasked. He never knew of such a state of affairs. He had never encouraged her by word, act, or deed; but, for all that, she loved him with a love such as a girl like Mildred knows but once in a lifetime.

Mrs. Morris had learned the girl's secret long before Mildred knew it herself, and she felt a great pity for her, for she knew, with all her sweetness, all her gentleness, she was not the style of girl that Gregor Thorpe admired; and she had often wondered how it would end.

She was not sorry when she heard Gregor say he "had come to bid them good-bye, for he was going on a little journey."

"It is better so," she thought to herself. "Absence may teach her to forget him."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Morris," he said, trying to speak cheerily; then he turned to Mildred. "Good-bye, Mildred," he said, extending his hand to her.

She arose, took one step toward him, looking pitifully into his face; then, without a word of warning, fell face downward at his feet in a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER XIII.

For a moment Mrs. Morris was dumbfounded. She did not know the news of Gregor Thorpe's unexpected departure would be such a shock to the girl, and the young man himself was far from guessing the cause of her sudden swoon.

He lifted her up tenderly in his arms, and bore her to a couch.

"Poor girl!" he said, compassionately, "how weak she is still, Mrs. Morris!"

"Yes," murmured the good woman, putting back the dark ring of hair from the girl's marble-white brow. "I—I—wish she was well married, instead of having to go out to work for her living. She is one of those sweet, tender, clinging young girls who should have a loving, kind young husband to care for her."

"I hope to Heaven that she will get just such a one," responded Gregor, heartily.

Mrs. Morris looked at him keenly and saw that he was utterly unconscious of Mildred's great attachment to himself, and she realised, too, by his words how indifferent he was to the girl.

"Look to your charge, Mrs. Morris," he said. "First get her out of this swoon and make her comfortable, then I should like to have a little talk with you. I have something to tell you. Will you come to the summer-house to me?"

"Yes, Gregor," she answered.

He picked up his hat and walked slowly from the room.

"Fate has destined Miss Mildred and Master Gregor for each other," she mused, as she watched the tall, straight form as it disappeared among the trees. "I ought to be able to bring about a marriage between them—ay, I will if I can."

It was quite ten minutes ere Mildred showed any signs of returning consciousness. When she

opened her eyes she found Mrs. Morris bending over her.

"Has he gone?" she asked, starting up with wide, frightened dark eyes.

"Do you mean Gregor?" asked Mrs. Morris, innocently.

Mildred nodded, clutching her two little thin white hands closely together.

"Oh, no! I don't anticipate that he intends going for at least a fortnight or so," she declared. "At least that is what I understood him to say."

The girl breathed freer, and she bravely choked back the sob that was on her lips. Not for worlds would she have betrayed to her friend how much her answer meant for her.

He would not go for perhaps a fortnight or more, Mrs. Morris had said. Why, then, should she think until the time came of the dark hour when she should look her last on his face—the handsome face that made the sunshine of the world for her, the only sunshine she had ever known in all her dreary young life!

"Come, my dear," said Mrs. Morris, soothingly, "drink this herb tea," and she pressed a cup to her lips. "It will make you sleep. You will come out of it refreshed. I want you to be up and about, for I am going to ask Mr. Gregor to stay to tea."

Mildred obediently drained the cup, and a few moments later the heavy eyelids drooped over the dark, wistful eyes, and the long, curling lashes lay against the white cheeks like a fringe of silk. She had drifted into the mystic land of dreams—that mystic land where the rich and the poor may revel alike—the world with all its burden of cares and woes forgetting, by the world forgot.

"Now, then," muttered Mrs. Morris, turning away from the sleeping girl, "I will go down to the summer-house and see what Gregor wants of me."

She found him pacing restlessly up and down beneath the cedar-trees.

"I was almost afraid that I should have to leave without seeing you," he said, nervously consulting his watch. "I must be off almost directly."

"Why, Gregor," exclaimed Mrs. Morris, surprisedly, "I cannot think of letting you go until after supper, as we call it in this humble little home of mine. I am going to get you up just those little dainties such as I remember you used to like so well when you were a boy."

Gregor smiled faintly.

"Perhaps that pleasure may be in store for me in the future," he answered, slowly, "but I cannot accept on this occasion. I wish to confide in you, my dear old nurse," he said, taking her hands in his and leading her to a seat; "I have something to tell you."

"One would think you were about to talk of a funeral, Gregor, by the very grave expression of your face," she returned, banteringly.

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"It is said a woman can never keep a secret," he said, slowly.

"I can keep one," declared Mrs. Morris, "and no human power could make me divulge it either! Even if I were on the rack it could not be wrung from my lips!"

"I am going to put your words to the test," said Gregor, quietly. "Promise me solemnly that you will not divulge what I am about to reveal to you."

"If it is your desire for me to promise, I give that promise freely, Gregor, even before I have heard what you have to say," she answered, earnestly.

He gratefully pressed the hands he held.

"You are not to divulge what I am about to tell you to any living being!" he questioned, slowly.

"No," she replied.

"Nor attempt to thwart me or urge me from my purpose!" he went on.

"If you have set your mind on anything, Master Gregor, it is precious little good anything I could say would do to make you change your mind."

"You are right," he replied. "When I am convinced that I have a duty to perform I never flinch; I accomplish it no matter what the end

may be. I might as well break at once into the subject which brings me here, Mrs. Morris. I am on the eve of fighting a duel with Dudley. It takes place at day-break to-morrow morning, and I have a few requests I would like to make of you—in case I should—fall."

A great cry broke from Mrs. Morris's lips.

"Oh, Master Gregor—oh, dear, dear Master Gregor," she cried, flinging herself on her knees before him and clinging to him hysterically, "surely—oh, surely you don't mean it. Oh, I beg of you, do not do it. You know how it will end—your cousin, Pierce Dudley, is the best shot in the country."

His face paled a little, but he made no reply.

"Oh, Mr. Gregor!" she entreated, "do let me try to dissuade you from so fatal a step—let me plead with you on my knees!" she sobbed.

"It would be quite useless," he answered, determinedly. "I shall be on the spot at the appointed hour if I live. No Thorpe was ever yet known to be a coward."

All in vain she prayed to him with the greatest anguish and the bitterest tears.

He had been her charge when he was a fair-haired little urchin. She had seen him grow up to strong, handsome manhood with the greatest pride, and now how could she see him go to certain death unmoved!

"You are not keeping your promise to me, Mrs. Morris," he said at length. "You agreed to make no demur to what I had to tell you. Never break a solemn promise."

"How did I know it was a matter of your life or death, Mr. Gregor?" she wailed, wildly.

"That makes your promise all the more sacred and binding," he declared. "You must listen to me if you would hear what I have to say."

Her tears came so thick and fast she could not answer him.

"I am, as you know, all alone in the world. I have made my will in anticipation of—the worst, and—I beg of you to listen, Mrs. Morris, I have provided well for you, my dear old tender-hearted nurse. The remainder of my fortune, which has just been left me by an old aunt, is to be equally divided between Mildred and poor, hapless Paula, if she is ever found," and she noticed how his voice trembled as he uttered the name Paula. "Here is a letter containing all that I would say. I intended leaving it in case I did not see you. I must be off—my second must be this moment waiting for me. Good-bye, dear old nurse! Say good-bye to Miss Mildred for me, and, if I never return, I say in the pathetic language of Dickens' 'Stearforth,' 'When you think of me—if ever—always try to think of me kindly and at my best.'

He kissed her as he had been wont to do in his boyhood days, turned, and walked rapidly away. And for the first time in her life the poor old lady succumbed to the deadly faintness that crept over her, and she fell face downward in the long grass, and there she lay for long hours until she was missed, and the little servant-maid, chancing to look in at the summer-house found her.

It was Mildred's turn now to minister to her friend; but the simple restoratives proved unavailing, and a doctor was summoned.

"A case of paralysis and apoplexy," was his decision, "brought on by some great mental shock. I may be able to bring her out of this, but ten to one she will not regain the power of action or speech for days; it would be almost a miracle if she did."

Mildred sat by her couch listening to this with the greatest of grief, and she knew that Mrs. Morris heard and understood the awful import of his words from the look of terror that crossed her white face and shone in the eyes that were raised so pitifully to Mildred's.

All that night Mildred watched by her bedside, and the look in the terrified eyes that followed her about the room constantly puzzled her.

"Is there anything that you would like that I can do for you, dear Mrs. Morris?" she murmured. "I know that you cannot speak, or even raise a finger in answer to my question, but I feel sure you hear and comprehend what I am saying. If there is something you wish me to

do for you, look me straight in the face; if there is not, close your eyes."

The eyes seemed to fairly leap to meet her own gaze and hold it; and the eloquent look of pleading in them, mixed with agony—even terror—puzzled Mildred.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I WONDER if it is something about Mr.—Mr. Thorpe!" faltered Mildred, half aloud; and at this the eyes of the sufferer seemed to fairly burn with a strange light.

"Yes, it is something about him, I am sure," murmured Mildred. "But, oh! if I could only find out what it is!"

And the agony that crept into the sufferer's eyes as those words fell upon her ears can never be described.

"Has he really gone?" whispered Mildred at length, with a great start; but the eyes gazing steadily into her own gave her no answer save that earnest, pitiful, steady stare.

"Close your eyes and try—do try to sleep, dear Mrs. Morris," said Mildred, earnestly. "You will be all right by to-morrow or next day."

And, even though the agony in the eyes looking into her own seemed to beseech her not to do it, Mildred proceeded to force between her lips the few drops of liquid in the spoonful of water which the doctor had prescribed to make her sleep, and the dose into which she fell lasted until nearly morning. Mildred watching patiently beside her; then suddenly they flared wide open, with a look of horror in their depths agonizing to behold, and looked into those of the girl bending over her.

"I think I will get your favourite book, and try to read you into quiet repose," murmured Mildred.

And then she remembered that the keys of the book-case were in the pocket of the dress Mrs. Morris had worn the day before, and which she had placed in the close.

Going to it, Mildred took out the keys, pulling out, as she did so, her handkerchief, and with it, the letter which Gregor Thorpe had given to Mrs. Morris, and, as she turned about, Mildred saw it lying at her feet.

"Where did this come from, I wonder?" she exclaimed, surprisedly, stooping and picking it up from the floor, for she had not observed it fall. "A sealed letter, and—and it is in Mr. Thorpe's handwriting, too."

She brought it quickly to the couch.

"I have just come across this lying on the floor," she said. "I wonder if you care for me to break the seal and read it to you!" she questioned, earnestly.

There was no mistaking the glad light in the eyes that fairly beamed into hers.

Little dreaming what it would mean for her, Mildred broke the seal. Her fingers trembled a little, but it was because the letter was from Gregor Thorpe. She would have liked to raise it to her lips and reverently kiss it because it had lain in the hands of the man she loved.

All unconscious of the blow she was to receive she opened it, and read as follows:

"DEAR OLD NURSE,—

"When you read this I may be no more, if Fate has so destined. At daylight on the morning of the twentieth, I shall meet my cousin, Pierce Dudley, in a duel in the woods at Highgate. If I live I will come to you at once to allay your anxiety. If I fall, I herewith make provision for the distribution of all of which I am at the present moment possessed. I have made my will and placed it in the hands of the able lawyers Messrs. Thorne and Blaize. I have bequeathed to you property and money to the amount of two thousand pounds. The balance and bulk of the fortune so lately left me will be equally divided between the two young girls, Mildred and Paula Garstin, that the search for the latter may be vigorously prosecuted."

"Good-bye, fond old nurse, who has loved me so well. Always believe me grateful and appre-



AS GREGOR LEFT, THE POOR OLD LADY FELL PANTING ON THE GRASS.

HETHERICK

cative of your devotion to me all these long years.

"Take the best of care of poor little Mildred. Poor girl, my heart beats with such profound sympathy for her. The last hope that I express on earth is the earnest wish that she may find her sister Paula. Tell Mildred of my fate very gently when you have learned it.

"One thing I would like to add in conclusion: 'You will find in my breast-pocket a little worn glove—a young girl's glove—let no one disturb it, but bury it with me.'

"Yours devotedly to the last,

"GREGOR THORPE.

"To MRS. MORRIS."

Quivering with intense excitement, Mildred read the letter through to the last word.

Now she knew what had caused her dear old friend's paralytic stroke. She realised the awful import of the letter, and sank beside Mrs. Morris's couch with a wild, terrified cry.

"Look!" she cried, shrilly, pointing in horror to the clock that ticked slowly on the mantel. "It wants scarcely an hour to daylight now. Oh, Heaven! oh, pitying Heaven! how can I save him?"

But the mute lips of the white-faced woman lying back among the cushions had no answer for her.

"Oh, I must save him if I can!" cried Mildred, starting to her feet with wild and bitter sobs; "there may yet be time."

Calling Patty, the little servant-maid, and giving her minute instructions in regard to Mrs. Morris's medicine, Mildred caught up her hat and jacket.

"I am going to try to save his life," she sobbed, kissing Mrs. Morris in a wild paroxysm of grief. "I know you would want me to leave your bedside for that. You are not in such danger as he is. If you could speak to me I am sure you would say to me: 'Go—go!'"

There was a sudden rush of tears to Mrs. Morris's eyes, and that saved her life.

All in an instant the pent-up cord of silence was broken by one great, mighty effort of will-power, and the gift of speech returned to her as quickly as it had left her.

"Go! oh, go quickly! for the love of Heaven, Mildred," she gasped. "You must find the place and stop the duel! Go, darling girl, and save Gregor! You will find some money in my purse; take it, you may need it. Get a cab, quick!"

A moment later Mildred was fairly flying from the house out into the street.

"Where should she find a cab?" she asked herself, fearfully, realising that every moment that passed was intensely important to her.

At that moment she heard the grateful sound of carriage-wheels, and as she passed under the street-lamp she saw a vehicle coming slowly down the street.

Mildred hailed the man.

"I want someone to take me to Highgate quickly," she said in a tremulous voice.

"I can take you, miss," he answered, "but I must charge you five shillings. I was just going after a party of young men who are making merry after a ball; but they can wait or get someone else. I don't like the crowd too well, anyhow, if you'll pay me the same, I'm at your service."

"I shall be only too glad to pay you the five shillings," returned Mildred, "but, oh, for the love of Heaven, drive quickly!"

"What point at Highgate, ma'am?" he asked, springing to his box.

"To the woods," she answered; and, seeing the look of amazement on his face, she went on quickly: "There's a duel to be fought there at daylight, and I must stop it if it is within human power."

"Oh, I understand now!" returned the man; "and I'll get you there if my horses don't give out. I cannot go into the woods—you will have to walk to the spot. Have you any idea as to what time the parties have agreed upon?"

"At daylight," sobbed Mildred, pitifully, "and it is almost that now."

"It's not far off," he declared, whipping his horses.

It was a memorable ride to Mildred Garstin. The agony of a lifetime was compressed into those moments.

The carriage seemed to fairly creep along, despite the lash which she could hear the driver applying so often.

Suddenly she saw the faint grey streak in the eastern sky which heralds the approach of another day. Oh, if the hand of Heaven would but stay the daylight for but half an hour!

It was a terrible race against time. The driver held the reins with a hand of steel, and every stroke of his lash told upon the horses. Despite Mildred's excited fancy that they were creeping along, they were fairly flying over the ground.

At last the cabman stopped, and called to her:

"Another turn in the road, miss, brings us to your destination."

"Thank Heaven!" breathes Mildred, faintly, clasping her hands tightly together.

The ring she wore cut into her tender flesh, but her excitement and grief were so intense she did not even feel the pain of it.

It was broad daylight now. Her face was pressed close against the window-pane, and her eyes were strained in the direction the cabman had indicated.

At last she saw the woods and nearly fainted at the sight.

Would she be in time!—oh, Heaven! would she be in time!—or would she be too late?

(To be continued.)

The term "admiral" was not heard of in the British Navy before 1806, and the first English seaman to take the title was one Gervase Alard, who was known as "Admiral of the Fleet of the Cinque Ports." The term, however, had been in use in France some years before the date here mentioned.



COLONEL CHESTER IS LEANING BACK IN HIS CHAIR, HOLDING BOTH HANDS TIGHTLY ON HIS HEART.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

—20—

CHAPTER XXXV.

DIMINUTELY Berry comes down the next morning, she marches straight into Colonel Chester's study, the room where he writes and reads, and to which he usually retires when waiting for solitude.

He is seated by the window with a newspaper in his hand, but as Berry enters in such tempestuous haste, he folds it up and lays it smoothly across his knees, looking at her with well simulated surprise.

She rushes into the subject at once, not having the power nor patience to work round to it by degrees. Naturally impulsive and very honest, she finds it always difficult to dissemble; and latterly there has been too much deceit.

"Colonel Chester, I will not be thrust upon any man against his will."

"My dear Berry!" he begins, in semi-fatherly remonstrance; but she cuts him short excitedly.

"You know what I mean. You know that Ronald May cares no more for me than—"

"Finish your sentence!" he requests, coldly.

"Than for any other woman with whom he might have been thrown in contact."

She knew she had been unguarded in her speech, and that she had given him an opening of which he will not be slow to avail himself; but having done so, her only course now is to brave it out and defy him to the end. She is playing for high stakes and cannot afford to count the cost. Anything is better than this loveless marriage into which circumstances are combining to force her.

On her feverish excitement—the consequence of a restless, sleepless night—Colonel Chester's sharp, metallic voice falls like drops of water lead.

"And if Mr. May is not spris with you, may I ask on whose account he has visited my bunglow so often?"

Instantly she sees the trap into which she has fallen.

"If he ever cared for me at all, it is over now," she prevaricates, in confusion.

"If!" he repeats after her, with a threatening emphasis—as terrible almost as that "if" in English history which doomed a nobleman to death.

She hesitates, and finally with a woman's privilege of irrelevancy, changes her complaint.

"At least you need not have so precipitated matters," she observes, in an injured tone.

"It is only natural that I should sympathise more with his eagerness than a maiden's coynea," he returns, smiling.

"He is not eager, he does not love me!" cries Berry, angrily.

"My dear child, you really must not bore me with your lover's quarrels," he interrupts, with an affected yawn.

"It is no case of quarrelling at all."

"Then jealousies. If you prefer the term. It comes to something of the same thing."

"Nothing of the sort. I am merely protesting against the cruelty of giving me a husband whom I do not love, and who does not care for me."

"You do yourself and him an injustice, I think," says Colonel Chester, gravely.

"How so?" she questioned, hotly.

"Let us talk it over quietly, if you please. In the first place, you will not have forgotten, I daresay, that letter which it was my misfortune to intercept and read. It was a little overstrained, I thought, and—well—demonstrative we might call it, I suppose; but I do not constitute myself a judge on these subjects. Many things have made progression since my own youth, and no doubt women are not behindhand in the advancement of their ideas. Only I hope you will not, in your superior large-mindedness, despise me for over-prudishness when I say that in my eyes nothing could have justified such a note but a deep affection on your own side, and a perfect trust in the love and honour of the man to whom you addressed yourself."

Berry is silent, utterly crushed, and he proceeds with something of the delight a cat must feel in torturing a mouse—no pity for the fear that is evident in the pretty, sparkling dark eyes, and no admiration for the graceful bounds that are made in vain efforts to regain a lost freedom, interfering with the cruel sensuousness of its enjoyment.

"Then, again, there was that meeting on the hill. Of course I am perfectly aware that women allow themselves greater latitude in their conduct than was formerly permissible, but I will not do you the wrong of supposing that you are so negligent in modesty as some. It was quite sufficient proof to me that you were honestly in love, when I saw you clasped in Ronald May's embrace."

Again the words, striking one by one with such horrible distinctness, seem to her distorted fancy like waterdrops falling on her head, and she remembers how she has heard that in some cases such a punishment is given to cure a temporary bout of madness. Does he think to tame her so?

Scarcely knowing what she does she raises her hand, partly to rid herself of the fancied annoyance, and partly to ward off that terrible feeling of shame which overwhelms her at having to listen to such words with no means of self-defence.

He goes on remorselessly.—

"You must remember, Berry, that others may have seen that sight, and if only to save your reputation from the calumny that would in such a case instantly assail it, you must not even strive to free yourself from this engagement."

But this she cannot bear, and breaks her long silence with a torrent of passionate, disconnected phrases.

"Even admitting all this to be true, have I not the option of altering my mind? Was there never a case of fickleness before? Am I the first woman who has proved false? Has no other man in the whole wide world ever jilted a girl, or, worse still, even cast away a wife? Is society

to receive a lesson in faithfulness at the expense of Ronald May's happiness and mine!"

She stops abruptly, astonished at the effect of her own arguments, which, even to herself, have seemed miserably weak and incoherent. Colonel Chester is leaning back in his chair gasping for breath, and holding both hands tightly on his heart.

"Is it a sudden attack, or has some stray shot of hers pierced a hole in his armour and gone home? She cannot even remember what she has said.

Mechanically she takes a glass of water from the table and offers it to his lips, but he wavers impatiently aside.

"It is nothing—nothing!" he ejaculates, brokenly; and then, with an apparent effort at self-control, he adds: "May I ask you to favour me with a clearer explanation of your meaning?"

"I meant exactly what I said," she returns, boldly, following up what she supposes is her advantage.

"And that was——?" he questions, politely.

"That I will not be the scapegoat for other people's sins! I will not marry Ronald May!"

Directly she has spoken she repents, fearing what he may infer; but, realising her indiscretion even as she does, she is not prepared for the effect it has on him.

His face becomes livid in its hue, and his eyes, usually so cold and steely, blaze like fire. He has risen from his seat and gone close to her, the better to enforce his words, and now he grasps her vehemently by the wrist.

"Is this an accusation against my wife?"

"Great Heaven, no! How could you think it?"

She shrinks away from him in such terror that she nearly falls, and seeing that she is speaking truth, he relaxes his hold, one finger at a time, looking at her with a force of sight that seems to search into her very soul.

"You are sure?" he asks, emphatically.

"I am sure!" she returns, faintly.

He relapses then into his former indifferent demeanour and reseats himself, lifting up the newspaper from where it had fallen on the floor.

"Forgive my violence. Of course you will easily understand my repugnance to allow even a breath of suspicion to rest upon my wife's fair fame."

He speaks very quietly, and Berry can scarcely believe in a transformation so swift and so entire. Which is fancy and which is fact, or is all a dream? And to what will she presently awake?

"You understand?" he asks again, with gentle persistence.

"Yes, I understand."

And she does understand at last; seeing now, as she never saw before what capabilities of evil are in the man; how nothing would stand in the way of his wrath when once it is fairly aroused. There must surely be Italian or Spanish blood in his veins—something of the spirit of the ancient vendetta, or the cruelty that lived in the days when a matador fighting against a maddened bull, or a gladiator's hopeless struggle with even wilder animals were part of the savage amusement of the people.

Yes, she understands; she knows that she is to be sacrificed to a feeling of revenge, and that no struggling against her persecutor will avail. Colonel Chester loves his wife too fondly to lightly cause her a moment's pain, but he has no pity for the girl he has chosen to suffer in her stead. It is like fighting the air to resist his will.

Then suddenly it flashes upon her as a forlorn hope, that she may purchase her own safety by appearing to imperil his. She will tax him with the meeting in the khud and either prove a wrong done to Eve or her own suspicions unfounded.

"Colonel Chester, who was that woman with you yesterday, who appeared to have a claim upon you, and whose handkerchiefs are marked with your crest and the name, Aline?"

She has spoken courageously, but now that she has shot her bolt waits anxiously for the result. Will he satisfy her curiosity, or deal out a summary punishment for her interference in his affairs? Estimating him so unscrupulous as she

does, she would feel no surprise were he to fall her to the ground and effectually silence her forever.

For a moment he glares fiercely, angry at her audacity in thus questioning his actions, and at a loss for a suitable reply.

"Have you added eavesdropping to your other accomplishments?" he asks, with a satire adopted to give himself time for thought.

"That is no answer to my question," she says, bravely, but trembling all over at her own daring.

"I have yet to acknowledge your right to ask it. I have no intention of discussing with you episodes in my past life that I have not even thought it expedient to confide to Eve!" he answers, with a coldness that is perfectly collected.

There is at the same time something in his tones which implies that she has stepped beyond the bounds of womanly decorum in thus striving to pierce the veil he has deemed it advisable to draw over the deeds of bygone years.

Berry, feeling the rebuke keenly, blushes crimson and ventures to say no more.

For a moment neither speaks again. Berry's eyes are bent upon the floor, and Colonel Chester, turning over the leaves of his paper, seems as though only waiting for her departure to resume his perusal of it.

"I will not intrude upon you longer," she stammers at last, and makes a movement to leave the room. But he detains her with a gesture.

"One moment more, I beg. The subject has not been such a pleasant one that either of us should wish to renew it. Let it be ended now and forgotten."

"As you will," she murmurs, all power of resistance gone.

"A year or two hence when, you are Ronald May's happy wife, you would not care to be reminded of all this."

She shudders and is silent.

"You are cold, and apparently unwell. I must not detain you now. I only wished to assure you of my discretion."

Again she turns to go, and this time he does not hinder her, but, rising, opens the door to let her through.

"You may rely upon me," he whispers, with a malicious half smile, that happily she does not see. "Everything shall be done to forward your interests."

Berry cannot answer in the same hypocritical strain. She knows that her appeal has been in vain, and that she has done her cause only injury by it. She has sealed the fate she tried to avert.

With a little stifled moan she passes out, feeling her way blindly, and stumbling as she goes in her eagerness to get beyond the sight of those evil, mocking eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Two days later as Eve and Berry are on the Mall by the lake side they come suddenly upon Captain Carew. Eve is nearest to him in her jupon, and though he looks at her with admiration, no immediate recognition follows. Then catching sight of the brown-visaged little maiden walking by her side, he knows who it is, but does not wonder that he did not guess her identity at once.

There is little likeness between the graceful woman in her soft-hued draperies and filmy lace who is before him now, and the half-grown girl he remembers as Margaret's constant satellite. For there is no longer any doubt that by some strange fatality he has fallen in love with the sister of his former fiancée; but unfortunate as he feels it, he does not hesitate to step forward with outstretched hand, and a smile that is evidently forced.

It is not pleasant to recall those other days; but although he was certainly to blame, he does not feel deserving of the cold stare with which Mrs. Chester effectually warns him away.

She passes on, but Berry though dionting him herself does not choose that others shall do the same, and pitying his discomfiture stays behind a moment to let him speak.

"Miss Cardell, what have I done so mortally to offend you both?" he asks, in deep distress.

"It is because of Margaret," she explains, feeling that an explanation is due; and then, not waiting for anything more, follows her sister quickly and before Captain Carew recovers himself both are out of sight.

"You have no pride," says Eve, croaly, when Berry reaches her side.

"You have no pity. Surely you might forgive a fault committed goodness knows how long ago!"

"I was not aware that time was supposed to extenuate offences," returns Mrs. Chester, coldly.

"At least it may mitigate resentment," is the quick retort.

Her sister looks at her keenly. What is this fresh danger threatening her now? Has Berry repented of her anger and resolved to forgive John Carew's faithlessness, foregoing the revenge? If so, Eve knows enough of human nature to suspect that it will not stop there; and if she refuses under these altered circumstances to marry Ronald, what will become of her? Remembering her last interview with her husband she shivers apprehensively. More than ever she fears him now, and dreads arousing his jealousy anew.

"Berry, have you changed your mind?" she asks, timidly.

"No, only there is no occasion to heap contumely on injury."

"He injured us first."

"I am not sure of that. I believe with Margaret that he could not have been intentionally false. I cannot think him faithless nor untrue."

"What is the good of saying all this now? In any case you know it is too late," observes Eve, with a sidelong glance into her sister's face to see if possible how far the mischief has gone or is intended to go.

"Be comforted," answers Berry, with quick bitterness. "I am contemplating no change in the programme, I assure you. Only now that there is a real obstacle between us, I cannot but see that the other was of no account. If I were free I would ask him for an explanation, and have no doubt as to the result."

"But you are not free."

"No. Why need you remind me of my chains?"

"I think you are absurdly melodramatic," declares Mrs. Chester, with an unaccountable feeling of displeasure against her sister for despising what to her would be greatest gain.

After this Berry maintains an injured silence.

She goes straight to her room when they reach home, and prefers remaining there to joining her sister again with the chance of that hateful subject being renewed.

And Eve, left alone, has taken up a novel and lost herself in it so completely that it is with an effort she comes back to earth half-an-hour afterwards to find the bearer standing by her side. She looks listlessly at the card he is presenting to her notice; but at the name she sees starts into indignant life.

"Captain Carew!" she ejaculates. "Tell him the door is shut."

The man departs forthwith, showing no surprise at the message.

It is a common enough excuse in a country where the heat often incapacitates one for receiving visitors, and even if a further reason were necessary, to-day the English mail goes out.

But what does surprise him, perhaps, is that this "mohib" will not accept his dismissal from the door, and scribbling a few words on it hastily with a pencil, sends up a second card. His mistress, too, he notices, grows wrath as she reads what is written.

"For the sake of old days and for Margaret's sake, let me speak to you if only for a moment."

"Salam," she says to the wondering servant, who for the first time sees this usually irrevocable sentence of exclusion reserved.

She has risen from her seat, waiting thus to receive him, and if Captain Carew had doubted her displeasure before, that doubt would have been extinguished now.

"To what am I indebted?" she begins,

haughtily, and then pauses, seeing in his face something that stays her words.

" Of what is it you suspect me that you treat me like a criminal ? " he cries, hotly, in his excitement forgetting to be courteous.

" Why do you ask ? You know as well as I why Margaret died."

" Margaret died ! " he repeats after her, blankly.

" You are not going to pretend that you hear of it now for the first time ? "

" No ; there is no reason for pretence. I saw her death in the papers, and was so sincerely sorry for you all. I would have written, only—"

" Only it was rather late to begin a correspondence after neglecting it so long," she retorts, with sharp satire.

" Did Margaret expect to hear ? "

" Strange to say, she did."

" If I had but known ! "

" Would it have influenced your conduct ? I confess I agreed with you in thinking that silence was more graceful ; it would have been difficult to put such villainy into words ! "

Captain Carew lays his hat and stick upon the table, and passes his hand slowly through his hair.

" Villainy ! " he repeats, with a bewildered air. " Do you realise what you say, and can you possibly mean it ? Surely there is some mistake."

The fair face flushes angrily, and the slight figure is drawn up to its full height as she replies :

" It may be considered etiquette to ignore an injury like that ; we women are supposed to suffer in silence I know. She never said a word, but I, surely I may be allowed to show how I despise you for what you did ! "

" What have I done ? " he asks, desperately.

" Need you inquire ? Surely to affect ignorance is fresh instance of cowardice in you, and would be false delicacy in me."

" Upon my honour you hit hard," he mutters beneath his breath. But she hears him.

" Not harder than you deserve," she retorts, mercilessly.

" If vanity is such a deadly sin, I am not the only sinner."

" Vanity—what has vanity to do with it ? " she questions, in her turn amazed.

" It was with no ill-intent," he goes on, not hearing her remark.

" I do not understand you," she replies. " It was not the fault of a moment. Any time during the next six months you might have written, repeated, and been forgiven."

" Captain Cardell distinctly informed me that no letter written by me would be opened or read. In fact, he commanded absolute silence."

" What had my father to say to it ? " she murmurs, uneasily ; but some instinct in her heart furnishes her with the answer she dreads.

Captain Cardell's faults have not been entirely hidden from his daughters, but what cruel scheming will be revealed now.

Unable to stand, she is forced to sink again into her seat, and motions Captain Carew to take an opposite chair.

" Sit down and tell me all about it," she says, and tremblingly awaits what he has to divulge.

" Let me know first of what I am accused then I can make a better defence."

" There is not much to tell. To us it seemed a very simple and unmistakable case of desertion. You swore to Margaret in my presence that you would be true, and then after you had left, we heard no more. Forgive us," she adds timidly, " if all this time we have been unjust."

" And Margaret thought this ? "

" She believed in you to the last ; but her faith was sorely tried, as day after day she watched the postman come and always no news for her. For one year it lasted so, and then she died."

" Eve, not for my sake, with the thought that I had forgotten and was unworthy of the love she gave ? " she asks, quickly, in his excitement reverting to the name he had called her.

by when she was a girl and he engaged to her elder sister.

" Her heart was broken. Somehow I do not think now you were to blame, but someone, someone is answerable for her death."

He is silent, guessing now where the falsehood lies and unwilling to give her new pain.

" Tell me all about it ! " she says again.

" What good can be effected by speaking of the past. If you will think me innocent of the falsehood of which I am accused I shall be content."

" No, I would rather hear. Do not be afraid ; there is not much illusion to be dispelled. Our father ever loved himself the best."

" He is dead," says Captain Carew, with an accent of unconscious reproach.

" But 'tis the evil that men do lives after them, and he has spoilt all our lives."

" Listen before you condemn ; it may not be so bad as you think. I will tell you everything from the beginning, if you will listen."

She motions him to proceed, but cannot speak herself, she is too overcome with anger and surprise.

" Do you know how it was that I became engaged to Margaret ? " he asks.

She shakes her head.

" It was in consequence of a conversation that I accidentally overheard between her and you. You had evidently been questioning her why she would not listen to Sir Seymour Lumley's suit, for just as I came past you on my way to the house I heard her say : ' Because I love John Carew.' So few words to work such a difference in our lives, were they not ? After that I could not meet you, and, full of new and conflicting emotions, turned back again and went home."

" Ah ! " exclaims Eve, and says no more. Much is explained now that puzzled her before, but she has not heard all.

" I never loved your sister. It seems presumption to say so, for she was so beautiful and good, and with a loving sweetness of disposition I have never seen excelled. But love is not in our own hands. I admired her, I esteemed her, and even loved her for her love of me ; but it was not the love a man offers to the woman who is to be his wife. And yet I scarcely hesitated. Full of gratitude for her expressed affection for myself, I felt I could only repay her for it with my life. I was such a boy then, so awkward and unformed, so unworthy of her in every way. The next morning, in fear and trembling, lest I should have mistaken my own ears, I asked her to be my wife, and she consented."

" It was a difficult part I had to play ; " he goes on, as she makes no remark ; " and I don't think I should have succeeded in the deceit had you not both been too inexperienced to suspect. From the first Captain Cardell saw and seemed to resent it, and when I was going to India, he came to my rooms and taxed me with it."

" Was that before you had said good-bye to her ? "

" No. I should not have dared to seek her again after what he said, and the very next day the ship sailed. Can I ever forget how he sneered at what he called my insufferable conceit, and my misplaced Quixotism. But it hurt me most when he affirmed that Margaret had discovered all, and was overwhelmed with shame and confusion. He declared she would never willingly look upon my face again."

" Not a word of it is true ! " breaks in Eve, excitedly : " Margaret loved you to the last, and thought that you loved her."

" Then what could be the object of such a cruel lie ? " he asks, aghast.

" Can't you guess ? Don't you know that you had a formidable rival in Sir Seymour—and his greater wealth ? "

" I understand ; if I had only suspected it before ! "

" It is not easy to imagine such wickedness. Do you wonder that Berry and I can feel so little grief at such a father's death ? "

" Ah ! Berry. Mrs. Chester, when may I see her and tell her all the truth ? "

" Is that necessary ? " questions Eve, quickly,

for the first time seeing what such a confession might entail.

" I think you will agree with me that it is, when I tell you that I love her, and wish to make her my wife."

The words are simple and without any expression of exaggerated feeling, but Eve knows something of the straightforward character of the man, and does not doubt his earnestness.

Eve knows he loves her sister truly, and that Berry loves him. Can she dare to come between them, claiming the fulfilment of a promise given under such a different impression ? Can she still urge on this loveless marriage with Ronald May for her own safety's sake ? Were it not better she should confess all to her husband, and take upon herself the consequences of her own indiscretion ! After all, it is only an indiscretion ; but then she knows that Colonel Chester would punish an indiscretion of such a nature as severely as an actual sin. Must she brave his wrath ?

Captain Carew is watching her anxiously.

" You do not object to me as a husband for your sister ? " he asks, in slight surprise.

" Do you not know, have you not heard, that Berry is engaged ? "

" Great Heavens ! No."

The words came out almost against her will, so violent a dread has she of her husband's anger, but in her heart she already repents them, seeing his despair.

" Who is it ? " he asks.

" Mr. May ! " she answers.

The name conveys no idea to his mind. He has never met with Ronald nor even heard his name.

" He is a subaltern in my husband's regiment," she explains.

" And has known her long, of course ? "

" Yes, it is some time since they first met."

He rises to go. What can it profit him to stay, seeing that his love is lost to him for ever. Indeed, it would only add to his regret to see her now, when only a moment ago he felt so sure of his success.

Should I have had a chance if this misunderstanding had not been ? "

A moment's hesitation, of which he mistakes the cause.

She is looking nervously at the door, as though dreading that someone, evidently unwelcome in prospective, might enter there.

" Forgive me, I had no right to ask," he continues hastily. " It should be enough that I have no hope now."

" What shall I say to her ? " asks Eve, half unconsciously, giving voice to the difficulty that is oppressing her already in anticipation.

" Whatever you think best. Only it would comfort me to know that I was acquitted in her thoughts."

" I will tell her all if you wish."

" I leave it entirely to you."

He does not understand her quite, and has no curiosity to inquire into her meaning, being so utterly subdued and despairing quite. He puts his hand in farewell.

" I have to thank you, Mrs. Chester, for your patient hearing of my story."

" Is it not that I have to ask your pardon for the injustice we have unconsciously done to you all these years ? " she asks, sadly, thinking of the even greater injury that since then has been inflicted on him.

" The blame is with the dead, let it rest in peace," he answers, gravely.

Her face is buried in her hands, and though there is no sound of sobbing, the heaving of her shoulders shows that she is in distress.

Thinking it is sympathy with him that causes it, he stoops and lays his hand gently upon her head.

" Dear Mrs. Chester, do not grieve for me. I—I shall get over it in time, and—and I dare say she would have refused me in any case."

She looks up quickly into his face.

" Do not lose hope. Perhaps it may not be as you think, perhaps—"

Unable to put into words the possibility of her relenting and growing brave to suffer for her own sin, she stops suddenly and sighs. It is a relief that he does not seem to attach any especial

meaning to what she has said, taking it again as a general expression of sympathy.

"No, no ; you are very good, but I cannot deceive myself. I know it is all over now."

She does not answer save with a wistful glance, and after a moment's hesitation he departs with only a silent pressure of the hand.

What was there, indeed, that she could have said, when what would have cleared up all has been left unspoken.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LONG and wearisome is the battle that wages between self and safety in Eve's mind. She cannot at once without hesitation dash to the ground that tissue of fabrications which has been so carefully constructed, yet neither can she reconcile it to her conscience to wilfully and with malice aforethought destroy her sister's happiness.

They have no mother, and Barry is so young. Will she, Mrs. Chester, be answerable for her future fate ? She knows so well the quicksands and pitfalls that surround a marriage such as this would be. Has she not herself drunk the bitter cup to the very dregs.

She cannot plead ignorance in excuse should her sister's soul be required of her in the day of retribution, which will certainly come. Eve is no unbeliever—few women are—and the faith she possesses is largely tinged with fear.

Hoping for no reward, she has a cowardly dread of the punishment that is thundered out from the pulpit in no vague threats Sunday after Sunday in the small station church. The doctrine of divine wrath there preached may possibly be of effect on the coarser feelings of the soldiery in deterring them from evil, but on the whole it is more calculated to sow awe. Eve knows she ought to tell Barry what she has heard, even though afterwards she should again throw herself upon her mercy, imploring her to consummate the sacrifice that is begun.

That would be the most feasible plan, the middle course that always recommends itself to an undecided character ; but Eve has as little trust as hope, and is afraid to risk everything on Barry's generosity, knowing that, in a like case, she herself would not be strong to endure for another what she cannot even bear herself. Suppose all this sin and suffering should have been in vain, the suffering intensified and the sin not wholly lessened by the same !

Mrs. Chester inherits nothing of her father's gambolling spirit, and doggedly holds on to a present ill rather than take her chance of a better state. She is not intentionally false nor cruel, only weak and terribly afraid of the man that she has married. A dozen times a day a nobler feeling prompts her to speak out all she knows, and clear John Carew's character of the stain she herself has cast upon it. He has trusted in her, and it seems such unworthiness to betray where the confidence was so complete.

Nearly a week passes and still she is undecided, then something occurs to effectively weigh down the wavering balance.

It happens that she has gone into what, for want of a better name and by virtue of its two or three second-rate shops, might be called the town ; and, for a wonder, she has also gone on foot. She is never fond of walking, and Colonel Chester puts it down to the usual incomprehensibility of her sex that she has chosen a day like this for her perambulations.

He says as much as she passes through the verandah and declines to accompany her when asked.

There has been no rain, but the sun has kept behind the clouds all the morning, and now there is that suppressed sensation of thunder in the air which generally ushers in the storm.

The convolvuli that have sprung up in such luxuriance during the rains, and covered all the more legitimate garden flowers, are glowing in all the radiant hues which have gained for them the name of the morning glory. They are a little bewildered, perhaps, at the long vigil they have kept, for India without a sun is almost as

much an anomaly as Heaven without happiness or hell with no heat.

But there is every chance of their being presently refreshed, for darker and darker grows the sky, and one of those bursts of heavy rain that comes at times like a god-send to strengthen the earth to bear the subsequent days of ceaseless scorching sunshine, seems inevitable.

With a brilliant flash of lightning that set the heavens all ablaze the storm breaks at last, and peal after peal of thunder rolls out on the heavy air. Then comes the rain, not drop by drop as at home, but in perpendicular sheets of wet that soak everything they touch and transform the ground beneath to numberless running streams of water, miniature cataracts and pools all forming in the twinkling of an eye.

In the midst of it all comes Mrs. Lee-Brooke, panting and breathless.

"May I shelter for a moment, and dry myself if I can ? I am drenched," she says, dolefully ; and taking the permission for granted begins divesting herself of her gloves and the damp cloak that is clinging limply round her shoulders.

Colonel Chester has risen to receive her, and bids her welcome somewhat coldly. He would have escaped had he been able, but her advent was too sudden.

Berry only nods, and muttering a muttered "How d'ye do !" goes on stolidly with what she is doing. Certain comestibles ranged in front on a camp-table, and a small tin stove before her, show that she is making some of the sweetmeats, which, owing to the paucity of the country's language, are known by the somewhat generic term of "toffee."

"My wife is out. I hope she is not caught in all this rain," observes Colonel Chester, uneasily, and turning round orders a servant to go at once with the jempan and some shawls to meet her.

"Oh ! no, she is all right. I passed her just as it began ; they were sheltering and so absorbed in each other they did not see me ; so I did not like to intrude."

"She—they—who do you mean, Mrs. Lee-Brooke ?" asks Berry, somewhat contemptuously.

"How stupid I am ! Did I not say that Mr. May was with Mrs. Chester ? You know, Colonel, I always did say he was a great admirer of your wife's, but then everyone is that, so you need not be jealous, Barry," turning round to her with an arch smile.

Sudden silence follows on this remark. Colonel Chester is speechless with rage, and Berry bites her lips with something that is very like anger too. What possessed her to ask such a foolish question ? Will she never learn wisdom, and why does this hateful woman come here to blurt out all she knows and make fresh mischief !

The servant to whom Colonel Chester had given his orders interrupts them then, asking which way he is to take.

"Go to ——" is the thundered out reply, and then, bethinking himself of his guest, instead of the obnoxious word that is nearly spoken, he substitutes in a milder tone, "Go nowhere at all. Your mistress is under shelter, and the rain is clearing now."

And although he has said it only at random his prophecy proves true. In a moment, as it began, so it stops ; not gradually decreasing in violence, but stayed in a moment, as though the clouds had with one accord withheld their moisture in obedience to a quick command. The sun bursts through the mist that has held it back so long, and all nature, looking up into his glorious face, forgetting all his past sins and the cruelties it has suffered at his beams, receives him with a flutter of delight.

Only the convolvuli, that a minute ago glowed like purple and crimson velvet stars, close their brilliant cups, and are glad to sleep again till break of day.

The drops are still falling in short, quick showers from the over-burdened trees with every fresh gust of wind, when Eve comes quickly up the path, a huge umbrella over her head to shield her from the sun and damp alike, but her lovely face radiant underneath. Her eyes are shining and her cheeks flushed with such happiness that neither her husband nor her sister have seen there for many days. Fresh from the intox-

cating glamour of her lover's presence, she cannot directly relapse into her usual listless apathy, although the look that Colonel Chester throws upon her as she draws near is enough to freeze and send her back to reality at once.

"You were anxious about me, Alex ! You need not have been. I did not get wet at all, thanks to dear Mother Gamp," playfully flourishing the big umbrella aloft and then dropping it to take her visitor's proffered hand.

"You were in pleasant company, no doubt," says her husband, unable to resist the sneer.

"I—no—I was alone," she answers, quickly ; started into the untruth.

A smothered gasp of horror from Barry's lips, and a lightning glance from Colonel Chester's angry eyes, warn her of the mistake she has made.

Before she can retreat what she has said, Mrs. Lee-Brooke's ready tongue stops the momentary gap in the conversation.

"I saw you at the parson's shop. Buying bridal finery I suppose ? You and Mr. May were in close confabulation about some such mysteries."

Eve has grasped the situation now, and recovers her composure.

"By-the-by, I did see Ronald for a moment, but he is one of the family almost, and does not count, of course. As for Barry's wedding clothes, everything will be ordered en masse, I suppose, from some Calcutta shop. We must make the best of you, Barry, mustn't we ? and fine feathers make fine birds, eh ?" passing her arm round her sister's shoulder, and smiling reassuringly into her face.

And Berry breathes a relieved sigh that the difficulty is surmounted, not knowing what difference these last few words have made to her own peace of mind. As they are spoken Eve decides that she will no longer daily with danger ; she must relinquish for ever the idea of vindicating John Carew.

Mrs. Lee-Brooke stays a few moments chatting, and then takes her departure, quite unconscious that she has been playing with edged tools. Colonel Chester accompanies her a little way, and Eve goes into the house, throwing a deprecating look behind, which Berry understands as an apology for not waiting to discuss with her what has occurred.

Berry is, however, equally disinclined to talk about it. It is all too shameful—too humiliating to both. She almost looks forward to the time when she will escape from it all, even though it can only be as Ronald's wife. At least there will be an end to deceit then, and Eve will be delivered from this terrible temptation.

Colonel Chester does not return that way ; and presently afraid of the thought which idleness might engender, Berry goes back to her toffee-making.

She is on her knees, trying by force or persuasion to winnow the smouldering charcoal into fierce life, when, resting for a moment from her exertions, she looks up and sees Mr. Blythe advancing slowly in her direction.

He had tried to avoid this meeting, and to time his call when she would most probably be out, and there is a certain air of injured innocence about him, as he bids her stiffly "good evening," that Berry finds irresistibly amusing. Neither is she entirely at her ease.

A lover is a lover, however little he may be appreciated, and the Hon. Spencer Blythe's appearance is not the worst part about him. Anyone might be proud of having won his approbation.

He looks like a young Antinous, with the same mysterious melancholic expression on his handsome, high-bred face, as he stands before her in his loose, well-made cricketing flannels ; and if good looks were all that were needed to win a woman for a wife, he would not even now have reason for despair.

Looking shyly at him sideways, Berry acknowledges his attractions, and wonders naively if he is very miserable at her loss.

"Cooking as an enjoyment," a companion pamphlet to murder as a "fine art," observes Mr. Blythe, trying to joke, but laughing very uncomfortably as he speaks.

The girl glances at her delicate ivory-stick'd fan, and the two men-servants standing behind her, only waiting for their orders to assist, and looking amused, not to say contemptuous, of the Miss Sahib who is so eager to work when there is no necessity for industry. She laughs too.

"It is very hot," she says, pushing the hair from her face.

"Very," he assents, and again is silent.

"We had a sharp shower just now," remarks Berry, after a while.

"Yes, I suppose I ought to congratulate you," is the dolefully irrelevant reply.

"On what? the shower?"

"On your marriage."

"Oh!"

"When is it to be?"

"Not for a long time. Never I hope."

His blank stare shows her the solecism she has committed, and she hastens to retrieve it.

"All women say that, don't they?" she asks, with affected merriment.

"Do they?"

Some new idea is evidently evolving in his brain, and she waits patiently till it is sufficiently matured for communication.

The fact is he is wondering whether his case is as hopeless as he had supposed. If she is not in love with the man to whom she is engaged—and certainly her manner does not indicate a very ardent affection—why should she not take him in preference still?

Berry has poured the coffee into dishes, and sent everything away by the servants, so that now they are alone.

"I wonder whether it will be underdone or burnt; my culinary efforts are generally one or the other. I think"—thoughtfully—"I think I should prefer it underdone."

"Oh, yes, certainly," says Mr. Blythe, not quite knowing to what he has agreed. His mind is too full of this great venture which is to decide all.

"Miss Cardell, you knew I loved you," he begins, opening the attack.

"I inferred as much," demurely.

"And I am very rich; my wife will have a settlement as magnificent as that of any duchess in the land, and the Blythe diamonds are matchless, I am told. There are two or three estates and a town house, and the title, if you cared for that," he goes on heaping one inducement upon another until he gets quite hopeful, thinking no doubt she'd be "daft to refuse the lard wi' a' that."

For a moment Berry is angry, but she is too sorry for him to answer as she feels he deserves for the injustice he does to her, and, through her, all the sex. Sometimes, too, a little laughter is as efficacious as expressed scorn in bringing a man to his right senses.

She drops him a mock, modest curtsey, and sings with pretty mirthlessness,—

"Oh syne ye're the Laird o' MacDonald,
A great ons I ken ye maun be;
But how can a christen ons mighty as them
Wed wi' a pair lassie like me?"

But Mr. Blythe is not deficient in knowledge of the ballads of his country, and caps her song promptly enough with the last verse of the same, trolling it out in a full, rich baritone,—

"She's killed her gown o' green satin,
She's killed it up to her knees.
And she off wi' Lord Ronald MacDonald
His pride and his darling to be."

"You see that ended happily, Miss Cardell," he finishes, wistfully.

"Everything does in books," she returns, coldly.

"Then I wish we were in a book."

"Even so the happiness would be one-sided. What a mistake life is."

"You are very young to have found it so," gravely.

"What has youth to do with it? If I were older I might be more content. I should know better than than to try after the unattainable."

"That is a lesson meant for me," ruefully.

"What can you want that you cannot easily get?"

"Only happiness and peace. It is not so very much to ask," bitterly.

"I think it includes every blessing under the sun," he returns, with an unusual amount of earnestness in his languid, drawing voice.

"What nonsense we are talking!" breaks in Berry impatiently. "Come in and see Eve."

"Not now, thank you. I am not in a fit state for general society. I am disappointed and writh with myself and fate—altogether a bear with a very sore paw."

"And all my fault," remorsefully.

"I wonder if you could have loved me if I had wooed you differently at first, if I had thought less of myself and more of you."

"I don't know. I might have done," says Berry, with the air of one making a generous admission. And as such he receives it. She seems so far above him now that he has lost her, he wonders at his own supineness before. What madness had made him woo her thus *en principe*, or as a Sultan who might throw the handkerchief where he pleased.

"Good-bye," he says, humbly, and bending over the hand she gives, kisses it very gently once.

"Poor Pussy!" he ejaculates, with a little, sad smile at the joke that seems so far away; it might almost have happened in other ages, when perhaps other bodies contained these same souls, and before she can answer him is gone.

(To be continued.)

A FATAL INHERITANCE.

—10.—

(Continued from page 441.)

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Howell and his bride reached Pouncefort the latter walked quietly beside him until she came to the Rectory, then suddenly she fled up the path, and before he could stay her had burst into the hall, where she was confronted by Mr. Chapman.

"I want your protection!" she cried, excitedly. "You did me a cruel hurt when you made me that man's wife" (pointing to Howell's distant figure). "and you must do your best to repair it. You must help me to win my liberty, for I will never live with him. He—he has murdered the only man I love, or ever will."

Mr. Chapman drew her inside his study and sent for his wife; then he turned to the trembling girl.

"My dear lady, I have no power to keep you here," and he glanced warningly at his wife. But Hyacinth broke out,—

"I know what you think; he has made you all believe that I am an imbecile; but wait until you have heard all. I have friends in Italy who will prove that I am as well developed mentally as Howell Bede. Ah!" as he rung the bell and demanded admittance. "Oh! madam, save me, save me!" and she clung to Mrs. Chapman's skirts. "If you will not shelter me, rather than go back with him I will take my life."

Mrs. Chapman was far more astute than her husband, and something in Hyacinth's manner convinced her she had truth and right on her side, and Howell Bede had never been a favourite with her.

"Child," she said, gently, "you shall stay with us for the present."

"But, my dear," urged the vicar, "Bede has the law on his side."

"I don't care a fig for the law!" retorted the lady, irritably; "it is diabolical. Stay here, my dear, whilst I interview your scamp of a husband."

What Mrs. Chapman said, no one ever knew but Howell Bede, but she persuaded him to go away for the present, and he, seeing he should not damage his cause by violence, left the house threatening to take proceedings against the vicar and his lady for aiding and abetting Hyacinth in her rebellion.

No sooner was he gone than Mrs. Chapman

ordered out her little close carriage, which was an object of ridicule with all the Pouncefort people, and compelling Hyacinth to accompany her, drove off to the nearest magistrate to implore protection for the young wife.

This done, she took her to a relative's at the little town three miles distant, and left her there, bidding her keep a good heart, and remain in hiding until she heard from herself or Mr. Chapman.

All the papers were full of the pending trial, and Howell Bede's name was laden with unsavoury epithets wherever it was spoken. There was small hope that he or Julia would win the day, and they themselves were utterly depressed, and afraid to meet the eyes of those who knew them.

Little by little the whole story had leaked out, and at last Hyacinth's wrongs were to be righted.

The Signora Ete and her daughters were coming to England, accompanied by two of Lake Gray's old servants. Their evidence would be needed to prove Hyacinth's mental capacities, and the fraudulent way in which Howell Bede had disposed of all his dead uncle's goods.

"So," said Mrs. Chapman, "the poor child will get her own, and the Bedes have their deserts. Of course Hyacinth will be made a ward in Chancery."

It was then the height of the summer, and the day previous to the commencement of the trial. Howell Bede sat alone in his room, his head bowed down upon his arms.

"It must go against me," so ran his thoughts, "and even the most merciful of judges would award me a heavy sentence. I wish I had murdered her that night at Naples, no one would have been the wiser, and I should have been safe. I will not live to endure disgrace and imprisonment. There is only one way out of the trouble, and that is death. As for Julia, well, she was only an accomplice, she must fight or stand alone," with brutal selfishness. "Heavens! if only I could live again the past few months, I would not be the one to go to the wall," and his cruel face was dreadful to see. "I shouldn't care if only I had my revenge on that white, weak fool I was mad enough to make my wife. If only I had her here for one hour, I would bring her down to my feet, crying for mercy. Great Jove! how I would wring her heart!"

He paused, and there were great drops of sweat upon his brow, his lips were drawn tightly over his teeth, and his eyes were like those of a madman.

"It has got to be done," he said, "and surely I'm not going to turn coward now."

He walked to a chest and opening it took out a little phial filled with a colourless liquid.

"There is death here for ten men," he whispered, hoarsely. "Well, I've played for high stakes and I've lost. What use is there in complaining?"

No thought of remorse, or repentance; no pity for the girl he had so wronged, the sister he was leaving behind, and who, with all her faults, had been faithful to, and fond of him.

He sat down and scribbled a few words on a slip of paper.

"I have cheated them all. I shall never stand my trial now."

Then he poured some drops of the liquid into a glass and tossed it off. His head grew giddy and all his faculties seemed numbed. He tried to rise and walk to the couch, but fell face forward to the floor.

In the grey of the morning Julia found him lying there stiff and rigid, and fell down beside him, shrieking out his name in wildest accents.

After all Julia Bede succeeded in eluding justice. The shock of her brother's suicide completely unhinged her mind, which had so long been harassed by fears for herself and him; and for the rest of her life she would remain an inmate of a large asylum, harmless enough, but quite incurable, and always imagining that Hyacinth followed her from place to place, and threatened her with vengeance, always moaning

that Howell had deserted her in her direst need, and there was now no one to defend her.

Rather more than two years passed, and Hyacinth had taken possession of the Cavendale estate, had been welcomed by her tenants, and made much of by all the county families. The mothers saw in her a desirable wife for needy sons, and men and girls alike combined to praise her beauty and sweetness.

But all the while her heart had hungered for the dear friends in Italy, and at last she determined to go to Naples.

She had always corresponded with the female portion of the Este family, but she had been afraid to write of Raphael, and both his sisters and mother had refrained from doing so lest it should seem that they wished to "catch the heifers."

She knew he was in high favour at the Italian Court, and was winning fame and honour for himself; but of his movements and his affections she was totally ignorant.

On a soft August day she walked into the Este mansion, and was instantly caught and warmly embraced by the Signora and Amelotte (Aloysia was married and away), and it was very long before they found voice and breath for coherent speech.

Then Amelotte rose up, and volunteered to show Hyacinth "Raphael's latest purchase." She led her along familiar paths until they came in sight of her own old home.

"He could not bear that strangers should occupy the rooms that once were yours, and so he scraped and saved, and this is the result of his labour."

Together they entered the silent house.

"Come," said Amelotte, smiling, "see with what taste Raphael has furnished the place. Let us go first to your morning room."

How changed and beautiful the apartment was, yet there was a wonderful look of home about it. Hyacinth walked to a window and leaned out.

She did not notice that Amelotte stole away with an arch look in her lovely eyes, and a mischievous smile about her dimpled mouth; and she turned with a great start when some one close behind said, softly,

"Hyacinth!"

Raphael stood before her, his eyes full of tenderness for her, his face glorified by passionate love and happiness; and, reading in a glance how unforgotten and how dearly worshipped she still was, she went to him, clung about him, giving him kiss for kiss, lavishing all endearing epithets upon him.

The Chapmans were not forgotten, and their eldest son now holds the Cavendale living, and three months out of each year the Signor and his wife spend at the little Suffolk village; but Hyacinth is wont to declare her happiest days are those she spends in the old home, where first Raphael stood and won her.

[THE END.]

SLEEP, refreshing sleep, has a wonderful influence. It is the time which the vital force uses to repair the system, to assist digestion, and to prepare the whole being for the labours of a fresh day. Even "forty winks" in many cases is a great benefit, and in many cases of fever and nervous troubles patients should seldom be aroused, unless it is absolutely necessary, to administer medicines. Opium, when given, frequently but mock the patient with a seeming relief, only to result in some aggravation of the trouble; they more or less paralyse the digestive organs, prevent vital repair, goad the brain into feverish dreams, and leave the nerves irritated and finally depressed rather than rested.

PATCHWORK.—PERCIVAL COOMBS' famous parcel, No. 1, contains 100 pieces coloured silks; No. 2, 200 smaller pieces; No. 3, 50 coloured velvets—either of these 1s, 2d.; special parcel, 50 large pieces of coloured velvets, 1s 6d.—all post free.—PERCIVAL COOMBS, Holdenhurst Road, Bournemouth.

WHAT LIES BEYOND?

CHAPTER XXXII.

"EVER Paul has deserted me!"

So had Mona once thought, in the bitterness of her spirit, of the man who, from the hour he had bidden her farewell at the prison, had dedicated his life to her service.

Paul Millar's first step had been to find the man she loved. It was a difficult task. Life was to Alton Ayre now a very restless thing. New scenes, new faces, were his constant cravings—anything, anywhere, that he might not have time for thought.

But at last Millar found him. Paul's name, written on a card, was strange, but Mr. Ayre bade his admittance, looking up curiously at the intruding stranger.

The honest blue eyes met his gaze unflinchingly. He courteously motioned to a chair, sinking back in his own seat as he did so; but, to his surprise, the stranger remained standing.

"I have come here on a strange errand, Mr. Ayre," Paul began. "I wear fustian, sir, and you broadcloth! I am a toller for my bread—you live without labour; but we both started in the same race. I ran fast and ran hard, but for me there was no goal. You fell asleep by the roadside, walked as you listed, yet you won the prize—won it to spurn it—won it to toss it aside valueless—won it to crush it under your victorious feet, and walk on without a backward turn of your proud head!"

Alton's lazy glance, with a half-surprised smile, rested on the speaker's face.

"Was the man mad? Of what was he talking? 'Pardon me, sir! I may be very obtuse, but I quite fail to understand you.'"

"Then I will make my meaning clearer," Paul answered. "I'm not elegant, sir, as you are. I'm only a poor fisherman, without birth or breeding, with little education except such as I could pick up in my spare hours, but I never yet tried to win a girl's heart, however humble, for pastimes; and though I'm 'man,' and you're 'gentleman,' Mr. Ayre, I'm prouder to-day of my title than of yours!"

"Really, my good fellow, I am quite prepared to admit all that you say, except the first count in your indictment. Have I been unconsciously robbing you of wife or sweetheart?"

"Don't taunt me, sir!" and the blue eyes blazed. "I came here to be patient, and patient I mean to be, but I can't bear taunts. I came for her sake. I love her! This gave me the right. She loves you. She never told me. She would not even give me your name, but I found it out. I knew it was not the other man who came to her in her trouble. She thought it was you. I saw it by her trembling, and the way she fixed her eyes on the door, and the disappointed look that came into her face when she saw as how it wasn't, and the sob that choked her. Ah, it isn't hard, for a man who loves, to read these signs. Well, when I knew as it wasn't him, I determined to know who it was. It wasn't very hard work to find it all out. Then I said, 'I'll go to him. Maybe there's some mistake.' You don't look, sir, as if you could have done it—you don't look, sir, all that I've heard of you."

Little by little the truth was dawning upon Ayre's mind as to the meaning of the man's words. His face paled, and his voice was somewhat husky when he spoke.

"I don't quite understand you yet," he said. "Tell me of whom you speak, and what is my fault."

"I speak of the girl you have deserted, sir—of Mona Foster! She was sick and alone in prison, and you sent her no word, no sign. You won her heart—the truest, bravest, noblest heart that ever beat in woman's breast—only to break it. Nay, that would have been kinder. It is bleeding itself to a slow, lingering, torturing death, and those who love her must look on and see her die."

Alton had risen now and confronted Paul.

"You lie!" he said, in low, concentrated tones. "I would to-day rather marry Mona

Foster in a prison than any other in a palace," I wrote her. It was she who refused to answer me. I begged her to write me one little word that might mend our broken troth—broken by her. I refused to believe all that others told me of her falsehood. I would not acknowledge to myself that she could play a part. When the letter for which I watched so eagerly never came, I went to the prison, determined to see and hear from her own lips if what I had heard was true—a story of her betrothal to some sailor, recounted to Miss Mayhew by her mother. At the prison the warden told me that I could not enter; and when I asked of her, he spoke of the young man always with her whom she was to marry, thus confirming my worst fears. Perhaps you are the man; perhaps she has made you her dupe, even as she has had me—"

"Hush! not another word!" interrupted Millar. "You wrong her, even as I have wronged you. There has been foul wrong, foul treachery somewhere. Who is this Miss Mayhew of whom you speak who told you this false tale? Had she no motives for working Mona ill? But we must leave that for another time. Yet it is a clue which you must follow, and if I mistake not it will lead us into the very centre of the cunningly-made web in which my lady spider sits so secure. No, Mr. Ayre, Mona is not, and never was, betrothed to me. I am far, far below her. I realise it now. It is left to some other man to give her the happiness I would sell my life to purchase for her. You say you love her. Prove that love. You will find her, I think, at Sea View. Tell her that I sent you. Once face to face, you will make all things clear. My ship is in port. By this time to-morrow I shall be aboard her. The sea's the best place for me yet awhile. Maybe one day I'll grow stronger, more of a man. Then, sir, I'd like to take one look at her happy face. You won't begrudge it to me!"

"Come and prove it!" cried Alton, extending his hand, cordially. "You're a noble fellow. My one regret in all that you have told me is the thought that I must build up my future happiness on the ruins of your wrecked hopes."

"No, no—you must not think of that! It's a poor sailor that can't take courage, even after his ship has gone to pieces on the bar. Wherever I sail, wherever I may be, I'll fancy her safe in the harbour, with now and then a kindly thought of me. You'll make her happy, sir?"

"If man's love can do it," Alton answered. "I owe you a debt, Mr. Millar, I cannot easily pay—I can never wipe out."

"Tell her I once missed the way to make her happiness. If I have found it now, neither you nor she owe me anything. She'll know then how I loved her, how I—"

But his voice choked. He wrung Alton's hand once more; then, ere Alton could detain him, he was gone.

But in Ayre's eyes was new fire, and in his breast new hope. Mona was at Sea View; Menlo loved her; Mona would yet be his wife!

"My darling!" he murmured to himself. "Will your proud lips ever give back the kiss I left there?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

In a tumult of emotion, Mona at last had fallen asleep. When she awoke, the noise and bustle without gave evidence that the day had well begun.

For a moment she could scarcely realise where she was—then her glance fell upon the portrait, and she remembered all the events that had so changed her life's colouring.

What was she to do next? was the question forcing itself upon her. So little money remained in her purse that she could no longer stay at the hotel.

She determined first to take some food, and then to sally forth in search of some employment. Casually, while waiting for breakfast, she glanced over the columns of a morning newspaper left at her table, when her eyes rested on this paragraph:

WANTED.—Companion for invalid lady. Apply personally at —.

She turned to the date of the sheet—it was that morning's issue.

Over and over she read the welcome words, as though they were a special invitation to herself. It seemed to her that thus, and only thus, might she construe them.

When her breakfast came it was with difficulty that she could force herself to eat, although she had felt faint with hunger.

With the precious newspaper clasped in her hand she inquired the way to the street and number indicated. After long wandering, and with much difficulty, she found it; but the moment that her ears caught the sharp, quick clang of the bell, as it responded to her touch, her heart sank.

An obsequious footman threw open the door, but a new respect came into his manner as Mona lifted her pale, exquisite face, and asked to be permitted to see the lady who had advertised for a companion.

"You are the tenth as has come to-day," he said; "but I don't think as any of them has suited yet. Walk in the library, please, for a moment, and I'll see if you can go up."

The library! The word fell on her ear with fatal import. The only library she had ever seen was that at Sea View. Save in the bookcases lining the walls, this happily bore no resemblance.

Fully five minutes elapsed before the man returned. Then, announcing that his lady would see her, he preceded her up a long flight of stairs, and along a wide hall, at the further end of which was an open door, and beyond a large, luxuriously-fitted room, carefully darkened, so as to make it seem like twilight rather than noonday.

The man bowed, and withdrew. Mona entered alone.

A moment she stood upon the threshold of the chamber, the lighted background revealing her dress of black to the one occupant of the chamber. Then she advanced towards the couch on which the sick lady lay.

"You have come in answer to my advertisement!" the lady said, in sweet, courteous tones. "Pray be seated," and she motioned to a chair. "You look very young," she continued, looking wonderingly at the girl's beautiful face. "What is your age, may I ask?"

"I am nineteen, madam. I hope my youth will be no impediment!"

"No; I think not. I only want some one to sit with me, or read to me. It is not the office of a maid. I would like to find some one whom I could love. I fancy, already, with you it would be no hard task."

"Ah, madam, you are very good! I would try very hard to be worthy of your confidence."

"Tell me something of yourself. Your face speaks for you, though I cannot clearly distinguish it in my darkened room; but your name, your references? Will you let me see them?"

Her name—her references! Had she been mad that she had not thought of these! Only since the night before she had learned that she had no name; and references—how could she obtain them?

Sadly she rose to her feet.

"I see, madam, that I should not have applied. I am a stranger in London. I have no friend to whom I can refer you. I saw your advertisement. I was alone and friendless, and it seemed to me as though Heaven had put it there for me. Pardon me that I have intruded upon you."

"Nay, nay. Sit down. You interest me strangely, and, though I may not be able to offer you this position, I can perhaps do something to aid you. Tell me more of yourself."

"There is little to tell you. I have been but a coast fisher-girl all my life, educated beyond my station by the kindness of a young lady who was my friend, my sister."

"And why are you not with her now?"

"I thought it best to leave her," Mona answered. "I know that all I say sounds unreal and improbable," she continued. "I do not ask you to believe it. You could not unless I told you all, and then—then more than ever you would say, oh, very kindly (I think you could

not be aught but kind): 'I cannot receive you here!'"

"But who is this young lady of whom you speak? Can you not give me her name that I may write to her regarding you?"

Mona's face lightened. This way out of her difficulties had not occurred to her. She had not meant to let Claire know where she was, yet what mattered it?

"Yes, I will give you her name. I am sure that she will tell you, madam, that you may not fear to trust me. It is Miss Raymond of Sea View, of whom I speak."

"Miss Raymond!" repeated the lady, in tones of utter amazement. "Claire Raymond! This is strange, indeed. Claire is a dear little cousin of mine. Only a few days ago my daughter Kate returned from Sea View from a long visit."

"Your daughter Kate!" gasped Mona. "You are Miss Mayhew's mother?"

"Yes; and you?"

"I, madam, am that wretched girl of whom your daughter has doubtless told you. I need not repeat the story. You have heard it. I have been in a prison! I have eaten prison food, and lived on prison air; and yet I dared come here to the mother of the woman who called me thief."

Mona spoke with a bitterness strange to her, and again she had risen to her feet.

"One moment," said the lady. "Yes. I have heard your story; but in listening I felt pity rather than censure. Having seen you I feel it doubly. Will you not let me hear from you what I have heard from others? If Claire loves you, you cannot be all unworthy!"

At the words of unexpected kindness, Mona sank on her knees by the couch, and clasping the small white hand, glittering with jewels, pressed it fervently to her lips.

"You never can receive me now, Mrs. Mayhew," she said, "though were things different, I would not rise from my knees until you had promised to let me stay and try to win your love. I cannot have so great a boon now; but I would wish that sometimes when you heard my name you would know me as I am. Oh, as you are, so might my own dead mother have been! Perhaps she will soften your heart toward me as you listen."

"Go on! Your father's name was—"

"Rob Foster, but he was not my father. His name is not mine. I have no right to any name but—Mona!"

"Mona! How came you by that name?" cried Mrs. Mayhew, in sudden agitation. "My baby—my little baby! Oh, Heavens! for seventeen long years no lips have dared utter it save mine!"

An awful pallor overspread her face. She had fainted!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SMELLING BOTTLES and water stood close at hand. Mona herself applied the restoratives, calling no assistance. She feared each instant to see Kate's malicious face appear, or listen to her jarring voice add some new insult to the many already heaped upon her.

It was but a few minutes before Mrs. Mayhew recovered. When she opened her eyes they rested long and earnestly on the beautiful face bending above her.

"Tell me," she whispered, in a low, agitated whisper—"tell me all—all that you remember of your life."

Patiently Mona obeyed. No sound save her own voice broke the stillness of the room as she told of her earliest memories, to the hour her adopted mother had driven her from the hut, and the revelation she had then made to her.

Here Mrs. Mayhew's breath quickened, and her clasp tightened on the girl's hand.

"Go on—go on!" she murmured.

"There is little more to tell, madam. I could not go back to Sea View. I determined to come here. I did not quite realize what it was to be in a great city, friendless and alone; but my dead mother will protect me. I have her picture now. I can dream of how she looked, the sweet face that

has come to me sometimes in my sleep. I can never be quite poor again. I would not barter this for all the riches in the world," and she drew the picture forth, devouring it with her hungry gaze.

But Mrs. Mayhew's hands snatched it from her.

"Light! Light!" she almost screamed. "Oh, Heaven, has the sea given up its dead? You said your name was Mona! Who called you so?"

"I named myself, a little prattling child, whom the seas had thrown upon their sands. They called me Mona. They did not know, but last night I read it in the papers, and knew it was the name by which I was baptised."

"It is! It is!" sobbed her listener. "Mona, do you know me? I am your mother!"

Then the wild wave of belief swept over the girl in a mighty torrent. She saw it all—the story Olafre had told her long ago; the strange whisperings at her own heart as she listened; the lovely, pictured face, which still bore trace to the sweet, wasted countenance, now plainly seen by the clearer light; the vision of the little drowning child, in reality a memory—all! It was no longer a dead, but a living mother who held out to her loving, longing arms.

With greater joy, she let them fold themselves about her, while heart was pressed to heart. Blinding, scalding tears fell from the eyes of both; emotion choked them. They could find no utterance save the two words "Mother!" and "Mona!"

Joy does not kill, or each felt that life would have ended. It was all so strange so unreal.

At last they grew calmer. With her head upon her mother's breast, while the soft, white hand stroked her brow, she listened as she was told of her babyhood.

"But, oh, my darling, the night came very soon. It was doubtless your nurse's body that was washed ashore. She it was who must have fastened the jewels about her waist. I had not given them a thought. How many, many sleepless hours I have passed, picturing your face as it might have been! I never saw a child without a pang. I thought, in adopting a little girl, I might fill the void in my heart, but it was always empty—always empty! My darling, look at me! How beautiful you are, my precious baby! Oh, Heaven, thou hast been good! But your father—how shall I break it to him? It will kill him with joy."

Her father! How the thought thrilled her! Father, mother, home!—she who an hour ago was homeless and friendless! She lifted her head to speak, when she caught sight of a figure standing motionless upon the threshold of the room.

The blonde face was white with fury, the light eyes glittering with suppressed passion.

"I heard," said the soft, sibilant voice, "from the servant that there was a new applicant for the position of companion. I did not dream, Miss Foster, that your audacity would presume so far. You probably did not know that you were coming where your perfidy would be fully exposed. Before I give the butler orders to dismiss you, I hope you will leave the house at once!"

Neither daughter nor mother could check the flow of words as they rushed from the thin lips. As Kate finished, she waved her hand toward the door.

Hot indignation flushed Mona's cheek, but she felt that her enemy had fallen. It was her turn to be generous. She answered nothing, but Mrs. Mayhew called Kate to come nearer.

"My dear," she said, "I have a great deal to tell you, but I find my strength is deserting me—I dare not tax it further. Only Mona—Mona is to stay always!"

"She shall not stay!" screamed Kate. "Have I no rights in this house? I will appeal to my father; or if she stays, I will go. She is a thief—a—"

But the sentence remained unfinished. Mrs. Mayhew had lifted herself from her pillow.

"She is my daughter!" she said, proudly. "Be silent!"

Then she fell back, white and gasping.

"Hush!" entreated Mona. "For her sake let us say nothing more here."

"Yes, you who are not content with robbing me of a lover, would also rob me of a home, and then bid me keep silent. But your lover is not here, and you may thank me for it. It was I who told him all—ay, and I glory in it. I have lost him, but so have you. What new tale have you whispered into this sick woman's ear, that you should cheat her into the monstrous belief that you are her daughter who was drowned at sea. Adventures! cheat! fraud!"

She hissed out the words in malignant denunciation, carried away by the fiery torrent of her long-repressed and wrathful hate.

Calm and white, Mona listened to the end; but when her mother would have answered, she checked the utterance.

"You have always been my enemy, Miss Mayhew," she said, quietly. "It is scarcely likely that you should not be so now more than ever. Yet I am glad to prove to you the bitter wrong that you have done me. Mother, tell her who I am."

"My child—my daughter, whom the sea has given up to me," answered Mrs. Mayhew, in a weak, faint voice. "Kate, retract what you have said. You could not mean it. You need not fear your place in my home. I but give you a sister. Will you not love and accept the gift?"

"Never, never! Though the false tale were true a hundred times, I would rather starve than share with her the daintiest morsel. I hate her! You hear me—I hate her! Would that the waves had swallowed up her detested beauty, and the fishes had taken her for food. Ah, Mona Foster, once more you have crossed my path, but for the last time. This I swear!"

And she swept out of the room. Mona sank down on the couch and buried her face. She felt kisses rising on her hair, while a gentle voice whispered,—

"My child, fear nothing. You have reached the haven of your mother's heart!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was true—all true! The lost was found, the sea had given up its dead; and even as God directs the flight of the swallows, so had He led the despairing girl to home and happiness.

There was no longer room for doubt, even in Kate Mayhew's breast, as long past midnight she paced up and down the room with restless fury. Its very luxury was new torment to her. Heretofore all—all had been hers! Her wish had been law. Now, though she might not be driven forth, she could hold but a secondary place. Kate had seen Mona folded in her father's arms, while he sobbed like a child, murmuring her name in broken accents.

To father and mother, it seemed only their baby who was restored to them. They could not realise the lapse of years which had converted her into a woman. They gazed in wild, incredulous amazement at her peerless beauty, and were ready to fall at her feet and worship her. But she herself was stunned with her own exquisite joy. To sit at her mother's side in a silent trance, to gaze at the lovely face, to feel the touch of the soft, white hand, to listen to the murmur of caressing words—it seemed to her that she had died and had awoken in Heaven; but to Kate it was purgatory. Hatred's fiercest fires burned within her breast, kindled by fresh flames of envy and jealousy. Was this girl now to cross her pathway and rob her of her fairest hopes in the moment of their fruition? She had sworn it should be for the last time: she must fulfil her vow! But how! Was not the girl now in a stronghold where she might not be reached? Not so. There was one way.

In the dead silence of the night, the frightful thought assailed Kate. The thin lips were more tightly pressed together, the light eyes sparkled with more malicious light.

"It is her own fault," she murmured. "She has brought it on herself; she has dared to defy me in her grand silent way. Did my mother, I wonder, feel as I feel to-night when she killed

my father? Ah, mother, it is your blood that stirs within me! Let it give me courage."

Crossing the floor and opening the drawer of her bureau, she drew from it a fanciful Little India case, in which was encased a sharply gleaming stiletto.

"No one would suspect me," she murmured. "I could place the weapon in her own dead hand. They would think she had done it herself. I will leave a note, acknowledging her story false, as though written by herself. They will think remorse and fear of detection led her to the act. Why should I hesitate? Has she not killed for all that made life worth living? Do I not hate her—hate her—hate her!"

The very utterance of the feeling raging within her appeared to give Kate the courage for which she prayed.

She carefully lowered the lights in her own room, then softly opened the door, intently listening. A neighbouring clock struck two. To her excited imagination the strokes seemed changed beside her ear. When one hour was added to the record of time, all would be over—one little hour to achieve her triumph even at this cost.

The room assigned to Mona was next to hers. Suppose the door were locked? No! It yielded before her touch. She had an excuse ready on her false lips, should she find the girl wakeful—a story of contrition for doubts, and a wish for forgiveness.

The lights were all extinguished, but flickering moonbeams fell full upon the quiet sleeper's face. Utterly exhausted by past suffering and present joy, Mona had fallen into the charmed unconsciousness of a tired child. The long lashes lay low on the white oval cheek; the red lips were half parted, the breath came evenly between. Her nightdress had fallen a little open, disclosing the snow-white throat. Never had she looked more beautiful.

"No wonder that you stole him from me," hissed the low, sibilant tones above her. "Shall I hate you dead as I hate you living? Shall I ever feel remorse for to-night? I do not think my hand would tremble though I knew I stood beneath the shadow of the gallows. At least your lips should never feel his kisses. Tisf! I named her right. First my lover, then my birthright. Never! Never!"

Almost of themselves the words escaped her, as though her crime would thus find its palliation in her own sight, at least. But the sleeper slept on. The moon only heard, and still shed wondrous light for the fatal deed's commitment.

Closer Kate glided to the bed. Her bare feet made no sound on the thick carpet; her serpent-like motions seemed scarcely to disturb the atmosphere through which she passed. She stood now directly above the peacefully-reclining form. Her glance was bent full upon the lovely face, her arm raised, her fingers tightened themselves about the deadly steel, her resolution never faltered. She wanted but to be sure of the spot. One stroke must do the work!

(To be continued.)

SWEDISH girls who come to this country seeking employment as housemaids usually bring with them at least one trunkful of household linen. It is really a part of a potential wedding-trousseau, for every Swedish girl counts upon getting a husband one day, and prepares against the event by years of sewing. The trousseau is begun in childhood.



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FACETIES.

PASSENGER (who has just tendered his legal fare) : "I'm not such a fool as I look, my man." Cabby : "No ; but I wish yer was."

"WILLIE, tell Mr. Whiteband the names of Noah's sons." "Not much I won't—this is vacation."

"I DIDN'T see the widow at the funeral." "No ; her gown fitted so badly that she couldn't restrain her grief enough to be present."

CONJURE : "Now, my little man, are you quite sure there is nothing in your pocket?" Tommy : "Yes, sir—positive. The rabbit you put there before the performance got away."

ATTORNEY (to witness) : "Mr. Chalkley, if I mistake not, you said a few minutes ago that you sold milk for a living?" Witness (guardedly) : "No, sir. I said I was a milkman."

"ARE you one of the striking miners?" asked the woman at the door. "Yes, mum," he replied. "I'm what they call a pioneer. I struck thirty years ago, and I've never give in yet."

"THERE are plenty of women who would be glad to get me," he said. "Very likely," she replied pointedly ; "but none of them would care to keep you after they had got you!"

GREYHAIR : "My wife is such a thoughtful woman." Betterhaws : "So's mine. You could not imagine all the things she thinks about me if I happen to be detained in the city."

MR. MIXUP (to his son at a concert, during the performance of a duet) : "D'ye see, Tom, now it's getting late, they're singing two at a time so as to get done sooner."

A MAN applied at our factory for a job. Amongst other questions the foreman asked him why he left his last place. "Well," he replied, "they asked me to please leave, and I didn't like to refuse them."

Mrs. BROWN : "This paper is a fraud." Mr. Brown : "In what respect?" Mrs. Brown : "Why, here is a column about 'Proposals,' and it is all about building contracts and such things."

"PAPA," asked Willie, who was laboriously spelling out an item in the paper, "what does a 'great manufacturing plant' grow from?" "From the root of all evil, my son," answered Mr. Tarbox.

FARD : "There seems to be a lot more fuss made of Miss A.'s singing than of Miss K.'s, and I'm sure Miss K. has by far the richer voice." Jack : "Ah, yes ; but Miss A. has by far the richer father."

ASKING : "I wonder why it is that these actresses always look so young in their photographs!" Grimshaw : "Oh, when an actress is young she has her portrait taken, and when she is old she does not depart from it."

MABEL : "You are looking rather pale of late. Why don't you do as I do, take a two-mile walk every morning for your complexion?" Eila : "And do you really do that? I had no idea it was you that lived so far from your chemist's."

HIZ : "Do you know that for the last hour I have been watching for a good chance to steal a kiss from you?" She : "Indeed. Don't you think it might be well for you to consult an occultist?"

"YOU perfectly understand, cook, that when the turkey is brought in for dinner you are to tell your master that I cooked it!" Cook : "Yes, mum ; but he won't believe me unless I burn it a little."

THE PUBLISHER : "We can publish your book of epigrams if you will guarantee us the cost of printing and binding." The Post : "Oh, no! I never could enjoy witicism at my own expense."

LADY OF THE HOUSE (to bairn, who generally calls when she is about to go shopping) : "Won't you let me ring for a little refreshment for you?" Bairn : "I think I'll take a little something just before I go." Lady of the House : "Oh, then, do have it now!"

"THERE'S been another engagement," said young Mr. Dolley, who had been reading the latest war news. "Oh, dear," sighed Miss Frocks, "I wish I could be in an engagement!" And in a few minutes she was right in one.

"WHAT is the magazine article you are preparing, Miss Elderly?" "How to Manage a Husband." "But you were never married." "Of course not. Did you ever know a married woman yet that could manage a husband?"

ADMIRER (time 2.30 A.M.) : "Has your father any objection to my paying you visits Miss Mand?" Miss Mand : "Oh, no—but—er—I think that he'd rather you paid them in instalments."

"He's your first cousin, isn't he?" said an old lady to six-year-old Freddy, alluding to a new boy, of whom Freddy was very fond. "Oh, no," replied Freddy, "I had two cousins before he was born."

MR. NEWWED : "There is no use talking—I won't eat any more of your cooking!" Mrs. Newwed (tearfully) : "And you—you said—you were willing to—die—die for me!" "But, madam, there are worse things than death."

SCHOOLMASTER : "Now, Smithson, that we have read of the principal reigning monarchs of the world, tell me which ruler inspires the most respect and fear?" Smithson (thinking of his knuckles, still sore) : "The one on your desk, sir."

BENEDICT : "My wife was rather worried when I left her this morning." Friend : "What was the trouble?" Benedict : "Well, she had been worrying about something or other last night, and this morning she couldn't remember what it was."

SOME : A restaurant near Leicester square. Jones : "Oh—er—garcon, regardez—er—apportez—voi le—la—." Walter : "Beg pardon, sir. I don't know French!" Jones : "Then for goodness sake send me somebody who does!"

FLOWER-SELLER : "Buy a nice chrysanthemum, miss?" Lady Author (particular about pronunciation) : "Excuse me, you should say chrysanthemum." Flower-Seller : "Oh, beg pardon, mum. I'm sure, I took you for a single lady."

JONES : "Nice growing weather, Brown? Your seeds, I suppose, are beginning to show well?" Brown : "Show, indeed! They've been up long ago." Jones : "How extraordinary! Mine are only just peeping through the ground. Difference in soil, I suspect?" Brown : "Not a bit of it! Next-door neighbour keeps fowls!"

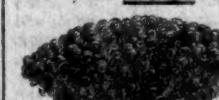
MOTHER (coming swiftly) : "Why, Willie! Striking your little sister!" Willie (doggedly) : "Aunt Frostface made me!" Aunt Frostface : "Why, Willie! I said if you did strike her I would never kiss you again." Willie (still dogged) : "Well, I couldn't let a chance like that slip."

"JOHN," she said, "you ought to punish that boy." "What's the matter with him?" he asked. "He's altogether too dictatorial," she replied. "He wants to rule everything." "Oh, well," he replied, "let him enjoy himself while he may. He'll marry some day, and that'll end it."

MR. GREEN : "Now, I'm going to tell you something, Ethel. Do you know that last night, at your party, your sister promised to marry me? I hope you'll forgive me for taking her away!" Little Ethel : "Forgive you Mr. Green! Of course I will. Why, that's what the party was for!"

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COURTELY GENTLEMAN : "May I ask if you were present at the creation?" Elderly Malden (blushing with quick indignation) : "Sir, I do not understand what you mean?" Courteous Gentleman : "Nothing, ma'am; nothing. I simply wished to enquire if you attended the oratorio by the Choral Society Wednesday evening."

"GOOD morning," cooed the good tempered schoolmistress. "I hear that you have a little sister?" "Yes, ma'am," said Johnny, politely; but he added, "I wish it was a boy, so I could play 'miveys' with him, an' touch, an' all those things, when he gets bigger." "Well, why don't you exchange your little sister for a boy?" Johnny reflected for a minute, then he said, sorrowfully : "We can't now. It's too late. We've used her four days."

CLERK : "Talk about close-fisted men, why, that woman just going out at the door would beat any man I ever saw!" Shopwalker : "Oh, it's a woman's nature to haggle over prices, you know!" Clerk : "But she didn't haggle. She selected her things and paid for them without a word; but during the nineteen minutes I kept her waiting for her change she never looked at a thing in the shop. Fraid she'd see something she wanted, I suppose."

MRS. TIPTOP : "I am sorry you were not at my reception last evening." Mrs. Highcup (coldly) : "I received no invitation." Mrs. Tiptop (with affected surprise) : "Indeed! It must have miscarried. I had among my guests three foreign counts." Mrs. Highcup : "So that is where they were! I desired to engage them last evening to wait on table at our theatre party supper, but the employment agent told me they were out."

SOME years ago a hearse was being driven towards the city of Aberdeen, and when still a few miles from town the driver was accosted by a pedestrian, who asked a lift. This the driver was willing to do, but as the box could only seat one, the traveller went inside the hearse. When Aberdeen was reached, and the passenger had descended, he remarked to the driver : "Eh, mon, but it's a rough haul in there." "Ah weel," says the driver, "many a one has I driven in there, but yer the first that ever complained."

A WELSH minister was endeavouring to make a hardened sinner see the error of his ways. The sinner could not see that he had ever done anything very wrong. "But even if you have done nothing wrong yourself, remember there is original sin," warned the minister. "What's that?" innocently queried the hardened one. "Original sin," gravely replied the minister, "is the sin of Adam, our first father. Adam sinned, and his guilt has fallen on all of us." "Oh, well," remarked the impenitent, with a sigh of relief, "that's not much between all of us!" And the minister was left meditating on this new view of an old theological problem.

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SOCIETY.

PRINCESS VICTORIA OF WALES has been giving sittings for her portrait in pastel to Mr. J. E. Braun, R.B.A.

THE Prince of Wales possesses a very fine gold smoker's companion for the pocket. There is room for three different sizes of cigars, half-a-dozen cigarettes, sufficient space for about half an ounce of tobacco, matches, and a midget briarwood pipe. He has it filled every morning, and always carries it with him.

THE Duke of Connaught is well aware of the advantage to an officer in the Army of other languages besides his own, and insists on a high state of proficiency in this particular in his children; as a result of the careful home training, young Prince Arthur of Connaught took first prize in his class for French at Eton last term.

It is practically arranged now that the Prince of Wales shall visit the Tsar in the spring, and it is probable that his visit will be almost coincident with an important event which it is earnestly hoped may give the Russian people their desire. If this be so the Prince of Wales will be on the spot to act as sponsor to the Tsarevitch, supposing it is an heir who is born to the Russian throne.

If her Majesty does come to town for one of the Drawing Rooms, she will then receive the Corps Diplomatique, the Ministers, and the *entrée* company, leaving Princess Christian to take the general presentations. The chances now are that the Queen will not visit Buckingham Palace before the first week in May, but much will depend upon the weather.

The Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, brother of the Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and the Grand Dukes Vladimir, Serge, and Paul, is said to be negotiating for the purchase of the well-known "Salle Lever" at Spa with a view to erect thereon a splendid villa residence. The Grand Duke, who is forty-nine this month, is Lord High Admiral of the Russian Navy, and a bachelor of cheery habits, who has a charming hotel in the Rue Gabriel in Paris.

ACCORDING to present arrangements, there will be two *Levées* at St. James's Palace before Easter—one held by the Prince of Wales, and the other by the Duke of York. There will be two more *Levées* after Easter and before Whitsuntide, and one in June. As to the functions after Easter, two *Levées* will probably be held by the Prince of Wales and one by the Duke of Connaught.

BESIDES the Queen, all the grown-up lady members of the Royal Family now carry walking-sticks, some of which are beautifully mounted with gold knobs. Her Majesty's sticks have handles to them, as she uses them for support in what very little walking she does. Walking-sticks among military ladies, too, are now all the go, and some of the stores are now selling scores a week. Walking-umbrellas are also coming into fashion. The Princess of Wales has one that is no thicker than an ordinary walking stick when folded.

THE Prince does not intend to start for the Riviera until after the second Drawing Room on March 3 d. The Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria are going this month to Copenhagen. The Princess will be the guest of King Christian at the Amalienborg Palace, and the Princess Victoria is to stay with her sister, Princess Charles, at her flat in the palace of the King of the Hellenes.

THERE is hardly a first night at the theatre in Holland which the Queen does not attend, and the manager of the Theatre at the Hague of Amsterdam can always be sure of the extra attraction of the little Queen's presence to give *éclat* to his premières. Queen Wilhelmina takes a great delight in amateur acting, and a few years ago had a stage specially constructed in a large room at the Palace at Het Loo, where little pieces were acted under her direction by herself and her young friends, her mother, and the ladies and gentlemen of the Court being invited to the entertainments.

STATISTICS.

A SINGLE oyster in season produces 1,000,000 young.

EIGHTY-FIVE per cent. of the people who are lame are affected in the left side.

AN inch of rain means that the quantity which falls upon an acre of ground weighs 100 tons.

OF the entire human race it is estimated that 500,000,000 live in houses, 700,000,000 in huts and caves, and 250,000,000 have virtually no shelter at all.

MINERS marry at an earlier age than any other class of society. Following them, in due order, come artisans, labourers, clerks, shopkeepers, and farmers. The independent classes show the smallest percentage of any.

GEMS.

THE chief hindrance to sympathy with the burdens of others is self-conceit.

LET friendship gently creep to a height; in a rush to it it may soon run itself out of breath.

To choose time is to save time, and an unseasonable motion is but beating the air.

In studying character, do not be blind to the shortcomings of a warm friend or the virtues of a bitter enemy.

THERE are few things impossible in themselves, and the application necessary to make them succeed is more often wanting than the means.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MAYONNAISE OF EGGS.—Boil till hard enough eggs for a good dish, then throw into cold water. Wash and wipe dry a couple of good crisp lettuce. Place in a bowl, and some sliced tomatoes, cold boiled potatoes, and some vinegar. Half each egg and arrange thickly. Place some more salad on top, and scatter grated bread-crumb over it.

STEAMED DUCK.—Prepare the same as for roasting, without any stuffing; put it into a stewpan with some bacon and two ounces of butter, stir over the fire; when brown stir in one tablespoonful of flour, add one quart of broth, a dozen onions, a bunch of parsley, a few cloves, pepper and salt, let it simmer twenty minutes, add a quart of green peas, simmer another half-hour, serve the duck with the gravy and peas in the dish, only taking out the parsley.

BAKED STEW.—This dish is not only to be recommended for its economy and flavour, but for the ease with which it can be cooked. Fill a jar with pieces of beef or mutton, and raw potatoes cut into slices; the meat and potatoes should be placed in alternate layers, adding occasionally a seasoning of salt and pepper and minced onions; add water sufficient to cover the whole, lay whole pared potatoes on top, so as to form a close covering, stew in a moderately heated oven till done; this will be known by the tenderness and brown appearance of the potatoes on top.

LARDED SOURCE CUTLETS.—This is an inexpensive and very savoury dish, the ingredients required being: one and a half pounds of neck of mutton, some fat bacon, three onions, two carrots, some parsley and seasoning. The cutlets should be cut rather thick, trimmed off nicely, then slightly pressed and larded with equal portions of fat bacon. Cover the bottom of the stewpan with the trimmings of the cutlets; add the onions, carrots, parsley, and seasoning. Arrange the cutlets on the top of the vegetables, moisten them with good stock, cover with paper well buttered; then cover the saucepan, and simmer on a gentle fire till done. Serve with strong gravy in a sauce-boat.

MISCELLANEOUS.

MALLEABLE glass, a patented article, is now used to fill decayed teeth.

THE worn-out uniforms of the British Army, when sold, bring back into the War Office treasury close upon £36,000 a year.

THE natives of Puerto Rico make soap for washing purposes out of the leaves and bulbs of plants, their shaving-soap being prepared from coconut-oil.

MERCURY is a foe to life. Those who make mirrors, barometers, or thermometers, &c., soon feel the effect of the nitrate of mercury in teeth, gums, and the tissues of the body.

THE greatest bay on the face of the earth is that of Bengal. Measured in a straight line from the two enclosing peninsulas, its extent is about 420,000 square miles.

THE aboriginal population of Australia is dying out so rapidly that it has been proposed to establish reservations where the remnants can be instructed in agricultural labour and cared for.

THE Turkish language is said by scholars to be the softest and most musical language of modern times, being better adapted to the purpose of musical notation and recitation than even the Italian.

EQUMALIT is the only place in the British Empire, according to a recent report, that exceeds London in cloudiness. Equmalit is also the damppest place in the empire, while Adelaide, in Australia, is the driest.

BULLETS made of precious stones are rarities in warfare. But during the recent fighting on the Kashmir frontier, when the British troops defeated the rebellious Hungas, the natives used bullets of garnets encased in lead.

SCIENTISTS assert that early man used to be able to wag his ears as an indication of pleasure, or to brush away flies from under his back hair; but as the muscles were not brought into continual use they became rudimentary.

THE marriage customs of nations are quaint. A Hottentot widow marrying again has to cut off the joint of a finger, which she gives to her new husband. Each time she becomes a widow and marries again she has to sacrifice one finger-joint.

A BURMESE doctor, when called to prescribe for a patient, just asks him to name the day and hour of his birth. If he was born in the morning, on a Tuesday, he, of course, requires different treatment than would be given to a man who came into the world on Saturday evening.

ALL LOVERS OF FLOWERS will welcome with unrestrained delight the appearance of "One and All Gardening" for 1899, and published by the Agricultural and Horticultural Association, 3, Agar-street, Strand, London. This useful publication is intended chiefly for amateurs, allotment-holders, and working gardeners, but we cannot imagine anyone reading it without at once wishing to join the ranks of those who find a real pleasure in cultivating a few flowers or vegetables according as their circumstances admit. This year the editor has secured tributes from authors, actors, philanthropists, journalists, clergymen, artists and others as to the excellence of the previous issue of this work; and all of them add their testimony to the benefits to be derived, mentally and physically, by all those who practise this healthy and innocent recreation in their spare moments. The book contains portraits of a number of celebrities, and is further enriched by many very beautiful views of flower gardens and rural scenes. The articles are written by those best able to expound the different subjects treated, and the general cultural directions will be found thoroughly reliable. "One and All Gardening" can be obtained for the modest sum of twopence, and at this price is dirt cheap. Every lover of flowers will be charmed and delighted with it, for the editor is a red hot enthusiast, and communicates his enthusiasm to others through the pages of this book, which, by the way, increases in size yearly though not in price.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

D. D.—Any person can write a will.

TENANT.—The occupier is liable for the rates.

W. A. S.—She can bequeath it as she pleases.

YOUNG MOTHERS.—Within twelve months from birth.

SURGEON.—A penny stamp is sufficient for any receipt.

DRUGGER.—If stamped it is a permanently binding agreement.

NAUGHTY NAN.—Acquaint your friends at once with the whole affair.

INTERESTED READER.—The first expedition to the South Pole took place in 1867.

PREDICTOR.—This is the nineteenth century 1901 in certain parts of the twentieth century.

STAT-AT-HOME.—A cable's length is one-tenth of a nautical mile (about 6,000 feet).

MUDDEER.—Everything depends on the exact wording of the will. Submit to counsel.

ANGLO-INDIAN.—Wherever a child may be born it takes the nationality of its parents.

IN DOUBT.—We cannot offer any opinion as to what the judgment of the court would be.

THE BARON.—George I introduced the black cockade from Germany as a mark of the servant.

ENGLISHMAN.—Prince Henry of Orleans is a son of the Due de Chartres, and grandson of Louis Philippe.

JESUIT.—We can only recommend a course of general reading in light literature of the best class.

HOMEWIFE.—Tough meat may be made tender by laying it for a few minutes in strong vinegar water.

COUNTRY BOY.—Liverpool-street station is now said to be the largest covered railway station in England.

IS DIFFICULT.—We cannot advise you one way or the other; it rests entirely with your own judgment.

JASON.—Apply to the authorities, stating the number and names of persons for whom admission is requested.

ODD RONDE.—A "reprieve" modifies or cancels the sentence; a "respite" merely postpones its execution.

ALMEX.—Methylated spirit is excellent. Well rub the spots with it, leave till dry, and polish with a soft duster.

BAN.—A sovereign weighs nearly a quarter of an ounce. The standard price of gold per ounce is £17 12s. 6d.

INDUSTRY SHOPPER.—A tradesman is not legally bound to sell any article at the price marked on it in his window.

B. B.—You must apply to the secretary of the company in order to have the necessary transference of shares made.

VENE.—What is generally used is ordinary wall-made putty. If the flower pot is very porous a coat of oil paint should be given it.

STUPID.—We must refer you to a respectable medical man. It seems to us that you require change of air as much as physical.

HOUSEKEEPER.—When putting away silver that is not to be used for some time place it in an air-tight case, with a good-sized piece of camphor.

THOURGH READER.—We know of no friendly society or charitable institution at which you could obtain the assistance on the terms you suggest.

NURSE.—As a poultice for a boil, take the skin off a boiled egg, moisten it, and apply. It will draw off the pus and relieve the pain in a few hours.

SCHOOLBOY.—An emperor is supposed to be a sovereign of several countries; therefore the courtly etiquette is to rank him higher than a king.

SUPERIOR.—Well rub the brass with half a lemon till all is loosened. Then wash in warm soap and water to remove the acid, and polish with soft dusters.

ZORBA.—Pour a little paraffin on to a plate or dish, and stand the flat-iron in this for some hours. Then rub off the rust and polish with powdered bathbrick.

LOVER OF BIRDS.—All birds when perched on trees or bushes serve as weathercocks, as they invariably arrange themselves with their heads to the wind.

WORRIED MOTHER.—Impossible to remove what is called a "birth-mark" without taking the skin also, and thus creating possibly a much worse blemish.

MAYWELL.—Portland is a small peninsula on the Dorset coast in the English Channel, used as a fortress and convict prison; it is usually spoken of as Portland Isle.

SARAH.—Make a soft paste of olive-oil and putty powder. Rub this well on with a piece of soft flannel. Polish with soft leather, and the scratches should have entirely disappeared.

KATE.—To make apple salad: Take one bunch of celer, cut fine, three large apples cut in small pieces with celery. Dressing: Two eggs, half a cup of sugar, one teaspoonful mustard, half a teaspoonful of salt, a little butter and pepper, one cup of vinegar. Boil a few minutes and pour over hot.

TOMMY'S Sister.—The title of colonel comes from a word almost the same in several languages signifying a column. The colonel was so called because he led or commanded a column.

JACK AND JILL.—An ordinary marriage license can be obtained at the Vicar-General's Office, 3, Creed-lane, Ludgate-hill, London, E.C. The fees and stamps amount to about £2 2s. 6d.

REIME.—There is no reason for withholding the little seasonable tokens of remembrance from her friends, or in acknowledging those received by her from them; it is all a matter of discretion.

HOUSE MILLER.—It is very seldom seen in a hat, almost invariably appearing in light-coloured stringless bonnets or toques, whose trimming is arranged so that it is slightly raised on one side.

IGNORANT IDA.—Classical music means the best music by the best composers, such as has stood the test of time. There is a large number of arrangements of so-called classical music for the piano.

MIMI.—We are afraid there is nothing you could do to successfully remove a stain from such an extremely delicate material. The best thing would be to place it in the hands of a good dyer and cleaner.

MONA.—Gin is the best thing to use. Place the stained part in a saucer with enough gin to cover the stain, and rub with a piece of the same material. Press on the wrong side with a moderately hot iron till dry.

SHAH.—The term "tabby cat" is derived from Afab, a famous street in Bagdad, inhabited by the manufacturers of silk stockings called atib or tabby. This stuff is woven with waved markings of watered silk resembling a "tabby" cat's back.

ILLALINE.—Beeswax is secreted by bees, and is used by them for building the walls of the cell of their comb; when this is drained off the honey, it is melted in boiling water, and the wax, which floats on the surface, is collected in the solid state when the water cools.

AN INDIAN CRADLE SONG.

Swing thee low in thy cradle soft,
Deep in the dusky wood;
Swing thee low and swing aloft—
Sleep as a pappoose should;
For safe in thy little birchen nest,
Quiet will come, and peace and rest,
If the little pappoose is good.

The coyote howls on the prairie cold,
And the owl hoots in the tree;
And the big moon shines on the little child
As it slumbers peacefully;
So swing thee high in thy little nest,
And swing thee low, and take the rest
That the night wind brings to thee.

Father lies on the fragrant ground,
Dreaming of hunt and fight;
And the pine leaves rustle with mournful sound
All through the solemn night;
But the little pappoose in his birchen nest
Is swinging low as he tells his rest.
Till the sun brings the morning light.

ISOPHON.—The eyes of bees are made to see great distances. When absent from their hive they go up in the air till they see their home, and then fly toward it in a straight line and with great speed. The shortest line between two spaces is sometimes called a "beeline."

A BASHFUL MAN.—As you get older you will find your bashfulness disappearing. Go into the company of ladies as much as possible, and be careful of your dress and appearance. Very young persons—both sexes are always troubled with bashfulness on entering society.

SPADE.—The marks on playing cards are said to have their origin in a symbolic representation of four different classes of society. Hearts represented the clergy; spades the nobility, derived from the Italian word "spada," meaning sword; clubs, the serfs, and diamonds the citizens.

LAURA.—The renowned Leaning Tower of Pisa, so called from the circumstance that it deviates fourteen feet from the perpendicular, was erected in the twelfth century by Wilhelm of Innspirek, a German architect. This building is one hundred and eighty feet high, and consists of seven stories, divided by rows of columns, and surmounted by a flat roof.

EOLANTHE.—First wash your hands, dry them thoroughly, and powder with oatmeal. Dust this off, and then slowly work the glove on, fingers first and then thumbs, but be careful to notice that every finger is straight. Fingers once worked on crookedly never sit really well, and in consequence the look of the glove is spoilt. The second button should always be fastened before the first.

DACTYL T.—We should imagine your bad complexion must be largely due to want of exercise and fresh air, but even if your business compels you to remain indoors nearly all day, nevertheless there is much you can do to improve it. Be out in the open air as much as possible, take long walks when you can, and eat good and simple food, avoiding sweets, pastry, and all rich and indigestible foods. Use Vinolia Soap instead of that you are at present using, and we do not doubt that you will speedily notice improvement.

ADMIRER OF THE READER.—For chapped hands, a good old-fashioned remedy is camphor ice, which is made as follows: Take three drachms of camphor, three drachms of white beeswax, three drachms of spermaceti, add two ounces of sweet olive-oil. Put the mixture into an earthen pot—such as a jam-pot—set it in a saucier of boiling water, and let it melt in a smooth consistent mass. It will be white, and almost transparent when cold. It can be poured into small ornamental jars when in a liquid state.

H. MALES.—From what you say we should imagine your affliction could be much improved if not removed entirely, by proper treatment. We strongly advise you to apply to one of the Ophthalmic hospitals in Birmingham; and we earnestly recommend you not to make any experiments upon your eyes, or to use any kind of glasses except upon very good advice, as you might easily irretrievably injure them. As you say, it is a pity they were not seen to long ago, and so the best thing to do now is to take proper advice without further delay. We should be interested to know how you get on.

SUM.—Carefully wipe off his quills—wash him in sarsaparilla—split and break the leg-bones. Salt and pepper the birds (it is safe to say you have at least half-a-dozen), lay in a flat dish, and cover with two table-spoonfuls of the best olive oil. Let them lie in this bath for ten minutes, then wrap in a paper case. Spread with olive oil and broil for eight or ten minutes over a clear fire or sants in the chafing dish, cooking the birds about six minutes on each side. Have ready six slices delicately browned toast; place the birds upon them, bathe with a mixture of one ounce sweet butter, half a tea-spoonful of finely chopped parsley, a table-spoonful of lemon juice and one grating of nutmeg. Lay upon each plump brown breast a thin slice of delicately browned bacon.

JUNO.—The roses collected should be fresh blown, of the sweetest smelling kind, and gathered in as dry a state as possible. After each gathering, spread out the petals on a sheet of paper, and leave until free from all moisture. Then place a layer of petals in the rose-jar, sprinkling with coarse salt; then another layer, with salt alternating, until the jar is full. Leave for a few days, or until a broth is formed; then incorporate thoroughly, and add more petals and salt, mixing daily for a week, when fragrant gums and spices should be added, such as benzoin, storax, cassia buds, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom and vanilla bean. Mix again and leave for a few days when add essential oil of jasmine, violet, tuberoses and otto of roses, together with a little ambergris or musk, in mixture with the flower otto. Cinnamon and cloves should be used sparingly.

MARY.—When a corn has shown itself, the cause of the trouble must be first of all looked for, and when found, be removed, and then attention be paid to the treatment, such as steeping the foot every night for a quarter of an hour in warm water, and directly afterwards cutting out of the warm water, removing the head with a sharp penknife or a razor. This must be done for a night or two until the hard centre part has been removed, and then a good corn plaster must be applied. When there is much inflammation it will be reduced by wearing for a night or two a cold compress made of either two folds of lint or linen, soaking this in cold water, covering it with oil-silk, cut just large enough to overlap the lint, and securing the whole with a bandage. When cutting the corn, these must be exercised not to cut too deeply and make it bleed, but this is very painful, and will make it tender and sore for some time.

G. H.—The stone associated with January is the garnet, which means constancy; the February stone is the purple amethyst, which is supposed to bring the virtue of contentment; March claims the bloodstone, which means courage; the diamond belongs to April, and indicates innocence; May is represented by the emerald, which is said to bring success in love to those who wear it by right of their birth-month; June claims for her children the pearl, the meaning of which is purity; the ruby is associated with the month of July, and brings to the children nobility of mind; August appropriates the moonstone, which is supposed to bring conjugal fidelity; the children of September should wear the sapphire, which brings success and prevents evil; October claims the opal, generally supposed to be unlucky, but when worn by those born in that month insures happiness and hope; November is represented by the topaz, which means that those who wear it by reason of their month may claim fidelity and friendship; to those born in December the turquoise is supposed to bring a prosperous life.

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ALL RARE NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Booksellers.

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ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

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TESTED BY TIME.

A sour, of which you can't swallow the second spoonful is very bad soup; and a letter that won't bear being read twice isn't worth the postage. Why, you don't begin to get the flavour of a really good dish until you have got to the second helping; and as to songs, for instance, what should you think of a song that fell flat as a flounder after it was first sung? And as to books, I have several hundreds of them, and not one in the lot that I haven't read half a dozen times.

Now a business letter, which by its very nature in some way touches the question of money—why, *that* ought to be read twice to make sure you precisely understand what the writer means; and when it comes to a letter full of friendship and loving-kindness, certainly *that* sort are not so plentiful—we can afford to skim the contents and light the fire with them.

But, after all, the best letters are not the letters that entertain us or the letters that stir up our feelings, but *the letters that give us a lift*. The man who shouts out cheerily when we meet, and hopes we are all right, is of course an agreeable chap; but the man who puts his shoulder under our cart wheel when we are stuck in the mud is the fellow for our vote if he ever stands for Parliament.

It is on this principle that we re-publish the following letter. On my table there are scores of others—all excellent and of recent dates—but somehow this one chimes in with my mood, and accords with my judgment as the proper lesson for the day. It is from a woman, who has the rare knack of putting things short, straight, and plain.

"When I was a young girl," she says, "I was subject to frequent attacks of sick headache, and heaving, and retching after meals. I got along fairly well up to the autumn of 1884, when I broke down altogether. I had a foul taste in the mouth, my skin was sallow, and I had no appetite or relish for food. After eating the least morsel I had a sense of pain, weight and oppression at the chest, with a feeling of tightness around the sides. Besides these things there was much pain between and under the shoulder blades, and so much pain

and weight at the back of the neck I could hardly hold my head up. Then, too, my breathing got to be so short and difficult I was unable to lie down in the bed. It seemed as if I must suffocate.

"Night after night I walked the floor all night long, anxious for daylight. I wanted to be moving about the house, as though to escape from myself. I had no rest night or day, saving an occasional doze in the armchair by the fire. I was very weak, and what the end would be I scarcely dared to think.

"I took many medicines and consulted two doctors, but was little or none the better for anything that was done. The second doctor said my trouble all came from indigestion and the liver, and the result proved he was right; but it is one thing to know what to do and another to be able to do it. For two years I suffered agonies and feared I should never be well again.

"Back in December, 1888, my husband had heard what wonderful cures had been done throughout the country by Mother Seigel's Syrup, and, now that other medicines had failed, he suggested that I should try it. Then he got me a bottle from Mr. Wand, Chemist at Leicester, and I began taking it, although, I must confess, without a particle of faith.

"Yet, behold! in less than a fortnight I was a new and another woman; free from pain and able to eat and digest nourishing food. This was so encouraging and surprising that I kept on with the Syrup, and *after I had used three bottles I was in better health than I had been for years*. Since then I have grown strong and am in the best of health. You are welcome to publish my letter, and I will gladly answer enquiries (Signed) (Mrs.) Eliza Farmer, The Common, Barwell, near Hinckley, Leicestershire, November 6th, 1894."

So far as we can learn Mrs. Farmer has had no illness since, which shows how real and complete the cure was. Surely so helpful a letter as hers ought by rights to be printed once a month in every paper in the land.



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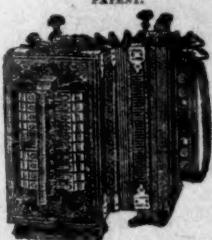
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